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LECTURES

ON

RHETORIC

AND

BELLES LETTRES.

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LECTURE XXXV.

COMPARATIVE MERIT OF THE ANTIENTS AND THE MODERNS—HISTORICAL WRITING.

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I HAVE now finiſhed that part of the Courſe which reſpected Oratory or Public Speaking, and which, as far as the ſubject allowed, I have endeavoured to form into ſome ſort of ſyſtem. It remains, that I enter on the conſideration of the moſt diſtinguiſhed kinds of Compoſition both in Proſe and Verſe, and point out the principles of Criticiſm relating to them. This part of the work might eaſily be drawn out to a great length; but I am ſenſible that critical diſcuſſions, when they are purſued too far, become both trifling and tedious. I ſhall ſtudy, therefore, to avoid unneceſſary prolixity; and hope, at the ſame time, to omit nothing that is very material under the ſeveral heads.

I SHALL follow the ſame method here which I have all along purſued, and without which theſe Lectures could not be entitled to any attention; that is, I ſhall freely deliver my own opinion on

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every ſubject; regarding authority no farther, than as it appears to me founded on good ſenſe and reaſon. In former Lectures, as I have often quoted ſeveral of the antient Claſſics for their beauties, ſo I have alſo, ſometimes, pointed out their defects. Hereafter, I ſhall have occaſion to do the ſame, when treating of their writings under more general heads. It may be fit, therefore, that, before I proceed farther, I make ſome obſervations on the comparative merit of the Antients and the Moderns; in order that we may be able to aſcertain, rationally, upon what foundation that deference reſts, which has ſo generally been paid to the Antients. Theſe obſervations are the more neceſſary, as this ſubject has given riſe to no ſmall controverſy in the Republic of Letters; and they may, with propriety, be made now, as they will ſerve to throw light on ſome things I have afterwards to deliver, concerning different kinds of Compoſition.

It is a remarkable phænomenon, and one which has often employed the ſpeculations of curious men, that Writers and Artiſts, moſt diſtinguiſhed for their parts and genius, have generally appeared in conſiderable numbers at a time. Some ages have been remarkably barren in them; while, at other periods, Nature ſeems to have exerted herſelf with a more than ordinary effort, and to have poured them forth with a profuſe fertility. Various reaſons have been aſſigned for this. Some of the moral cauſes lie obvious; ſuch

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ſuch as favourable circumſtances of government and of manners; encouragement from great men; emulation excited among the men of genius. But as theſe have been thought inadequate to the whole effect, phyſical cauſes have been alſo aſſigned; and the Abbé du Bos, in his Reflections on Poetry and Painting, has collected a great many obſervations on the influence which the air, the climate, and other ſuch natural cauſes, may be ſuppoſed to have upon genius. But whatever the cauſes be, the fact is certain, that there have been certain periods or ages of the world much more diſtinguiſhed than others for the extraordinary productions of genius.

Learned men have marked out four of theſe happy ages. The firſt is the Grecian Age, which commenced near the time of the Peloponneſian war, and extended till the time of Alexander the Great; within which period we have Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, Ariſtotle, Demoſthenes, Æſchines, Lyſias, Iſocrates, Pindar, Æſchylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Ariſtophanes, Menander, Anacreon, Theocritus, Lyſippus, Apelles, Phidias, Praxiteles. The ſecond is the Roman Age, included nearly within the days of Julius Cæſar and Auguſtus; affording us Catullus, Lucretius, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Phædrus, Cæſar, Cicero, Livy, Salluſt, Varro, and Vitruvius. The third Age is, that of the reſtoration of Learning, under the Popes Julius II. and Leo X.; when

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flouriſhed Arioſto, Taſſo, Sannazarius, Vida, Machiavel, Guicciardini, Davila, Eraſmus, Paul Jovius, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian. The fourth comprehends the Age of Louis XIV. and Queen Anne; when flouriſhed in France, Corneille, Racine, De Retz, Moliere, Boileau, Fontaine, Baptiſte, Rouſſeau, Boſſuet, Fenelon, Bourdaloue, Paſcall, Malebranche, Maſſilon, Bruyere, Bayle, Fontenelle, Vertot; and in England, Dryden, Pope, Addiſon, Prior, Swift, Parnell, Arbuthnot, Congreve, Otway, Young, Rowe, Atterbury, Shafteſbury, Bolingbroke, Tillotſon, Temple, Boyle, Locke, Newton, Clarke.

When we ſpeak comparatively of the Antients and the Moderns, we generally mean by the Antients, ſuch as lived in the two firſt of theſe periods, including alſo one or two who lived more early, as Homer in particular; and by the moderns, thoſe who flouriſhed in the two laſt of theſe ages, including alſo the eminent Writers down to our own times. Any compariſon between theſe two claſſes of Writers muſt neceſſarily be vague and looſe, as they comprehend ſo many, and of ſuch different kinds and degrees of genius. But the compariſon is generally made to turn, by thoſe who are fond of making it, upon two or three of the moſt diſtinguiſhed in each claſs. With much heat it was agitated in France, between Boileau and Mad. Dacier, on the one hand, for the Antients, and Perault and La Motte, on the other, for the

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the Moderns; and it was carried to extremes on both ſides. To this day, among men of taſte and letters, we find a leaning to one or other ſide. A few reflections may throw light upon the ſubject, and enable us to diſcern upon what grounds we are to reſt our judgment in this controverſy.

If any one, at this day, in the eighteenth century, takes upon him to decry the antient Claſſics; if he pretends to have diſcovered that Homer and Virgil are Poets of inconſiderable merit, and that Demoſthenes and Cicero are not great Orators, we may boldly venture to tell ſuch a man, that he is come too late with his diſcovery. The reputation of ſuch Writers is eſtabliſhed upon a foundation too ſolid to be now ſhaken by any arguments whatever; for it is eſtabliſhed upon the almoſt univerſal taſte of mankind, proved and tried throughout the ſucceſſion of ſo many ages. Imperfections in their works he may, indeed, point out; paſſages that are faulty he may ſhew; for where is the human work that is perfect? But, if he attempts to diſcredit their works in general, or to prove that the reputation which they have gained is, on the whole, unjuſt, there is an argument againſt him, which is equal to full demonſtration. He muſt be in the wrong; for human nature is againſt him. In matters of taſte, ſuch as Poetry and Oratory, to whom does the appeal lie? where is the ſtandard? and where the authority of the laſt deciſion? where is it to be looked for,

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but, as I formerly ſhewed, in thoſe feelings and ſentiments that are found, on the moſt extenſive examination, to be the common ſentiments and feelings of men? Theſe have been fully conſulted on this head. The Public, the unprejudiced Public, has been tried and appealed to for many centuries, and throughout almoſt all civilized nations. It has pronounced its verdict; it has given its ſanction to theſe writers; and from this tribunal there lies no farther appeal.

In matters of mere reaſoning, the world may be long in an error; and may be convinced of the error by ſtronger reaſonings, when produced. Poſitions that depend upon ſcience, upon knowledge, and matters of fact, may be overturned according as ſcience and knowledge are enlarged, and new matters of fact are brought to light. For this reaſon, a ſyſtem of Philoſophy receives no ſufficient ſanction from its antiquity, or long currency. The world, as it grows older, may be juſtly expected to become, if not wiſer, at leaſt more knowing; and ſuppoſing it doubtful, whether Ariſtotle or Newton were the greater genius, yet Newton's Philoſophy may prevail over Ariſtotle's by means of later diſcoveries, to which Ariſtotle was a ſtranger. But nothing of this kind holds as to matters of Taſte; which depend not on the progreſs of knowledge and ſcience, but upon ſentiment and feeling. It is in vain to think of undeceiving mankind, with reſpect to errors committed here, as in Philoſophy.

Philoſophy. For the univerſal feeling of mankind is the natural feeling; and becauſe it is the natural, it is, for that reaſon, the right feeling. The reputation of the Iliad and the Æneid muſt therefore ſtand upon ſure ground, becauſe it has ſtood ſo long; though that of the Ariſtotelian or Platonic Philoſophy, every one is at liberty to call in queſtion. LECT. XXXV.

It is in vain alſo to allege, that the reputation of the antient Poets and Orators is owing to authority, to pedantry, and to the prejudices of education, tranſmitted from age to age. Theſe, it is true, are the authors put into our hands at ſchools and colleges, and by that means we have now an early prepoſſeſſion in their favour; but how came they to gain the poſſeſſion of colleges and ſchools? Plainly, by the high fame which theſe authors had among their own contemporaries. For the Greek and Latin were not always dead Languages. There was a time when Homer, and Virgil, and Horace, were viewed in the ſame light as we now view Dryden, Pope, and Addiſon. It is not to commentators and univerſities that the claſſics are indebted for their fame. They became claſſics and ſchool-books, in conſequence of the high admiration which was paid them by the beſt judges in their own country and nation. As early as the days of Juvenal, who wrote under the reign of Domitian, we find Virgil and Horace become the ſtandard books in the education of youth.

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Quot ſtabant pueri, cum totus decolor eſſet
Flaccus, & hæreret nigro fuligo Maroni*.

SAT. 7.

FROM this general principle, then, of the reputation of the great antient Claſſics being ſo early, ſo laſting, ſo extenſive, among all the moſt poliſhed nations, we may juſtly and boldly infer, that their reputation cannot be wholly unjuſt, but muſt have a ſolid foundation in the merit of their writings.

LET us guard, however, againſt a blind and implicit veneration for the Antients in every thing. I have opened the general principle which muſt go far in inſtituting a fair compariſon between them and the Moderns. Whatever ſuperiority the Antients may have had in point of genius, yet in all arts, where the natural progreſs of knowledge has had room to produce any conſiderable effects, the Moderns cannot but have ſome advantage. The world may, in certain reſpects, be conſidered as a perſon, who muſt needs gain ſomewhat by advancing in years. Its improvements have not, I confeſs, been always in proportion to the centuries that have paſſed over it; for, during the courſe of ſome ages, it has ſunk as into a total lethargy.

* "Then thou art bound to ſmell, on either hand,
"As many ſtinking lamps, as ſchool-boys ſtand,
"When Horace could not read in his own ſully'd book,
"And Virgil's ſacred page was all beſmear'd with ſmoke."
DRYDEN.

Yet,

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Yet, when roufed from that lethargy, it has generally been able to avail itfelf, more or lefs, of former difcoveries. At intervals, there arofe fome happy genius, who could both improve on what had gone before, and invent fomething new. With the advantage of a proper ftock of materials, an inferior genius can make greater progrefs than a much fuperior one, to whom thefe materials are wanting.

Hence, in Natural Philofophy, Aftronomy, Chemiftry, and other Sciences that depend on an extenfive knowledge and obfervation of facts. Modern Philofophers have an unqueftionable fuperiority over the Antient. I am inclined alfo to think, that in matters of pure reafoning, there is more precifion among the Moderns, than in fome inftances there was among the Antients; owing perhaps to a more extenfive literary intercourfe, which has improved and fharpened the faculties of men. In fome ftudies, too, that relate to tafte and fine writing, which is our object, the progrefs of Society muft, in equity, be admitted to have given us fome advantages. For inftance, in Hiftory, there is certainly more political knowledge in feveral European nations at prefent than there was in antient Greece and Rome. We are better acquainted with the nature of government, becaufe we have feen it under a greater variety of forms and revolutions. The world is more laid open than it was in former times; commerce is greatly enlarged; more countries are civilized; poft are every where

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eſtabliſhed; intercourſe is become more eaſy; and the knowledge of facts, by conſequence, more attainable. All theſe are great advantages to Hiſtorians; of which, in ſome meaſure, as I ſhall afterwards ſhow, they have availed themſelves. In the more complex kinds of Poetry, likewiſe, we may have gained ſomewhat, perhaps, in point of regularity and accuracy. In Dramatic Performances, having the advantage of the ancient models, we may be allowed to have made ſome improvements in the variety of the characters, the conduct of the plot, attentions to probability, and to decorums.

These ſeem to me the chief points of ſuperiority we can plead above the Antients. Neither do they extend as far as might be imagined at firſt view. For if the ſtrength of genius be on one ſide, it will go far, in works of taſte at leaſt, to counterbalance all the artificial improvements which can be made by greater knowledge and correctneſs. To return to our compariſon of the age of the world with that of a man; it may be ſaid, not altogether without reaſon, that if the advancing age of the world bring along with it more ſcience and more refinement, there belong, however, to its earlier periods, more vigour, more fire, more enthuſiaſm of genius. This appears indeed to form the characteriſtic difference between the Antient Poets, Orators, and Hiſtorians, compared with the Modern. Among the Antients, we find higher conceptions, greater ſimplicity, more original fancy. Among the

the Moderns, ſometimes more art and correctneſs, but feebler exertions of genius. But though this be in general a mark of diſtinction between the Antients and Moderns, yet, like all general obſervations, it muſt be underſtood with ſome exceptions; for, in point of poetical fire and original genius, Milton and Shakeſpeare are inferior to no Poets in any age. LECT. XXXV.

It is proper to obſerve, that there were ſome circumſtances in antient times very favourable to thoſe uncommon efforts of genius which were then exerted. Learning was a much more rare and ſingular attainment in the earlier ages, than it is at preſent. It was not to ſchools and univerſities that the perſons applied who ſought to diſtinguiſh themſelves. They had not this eaſy recourſe. They travelled for their improvement into diſtant countries, to Egypt, and to the Eaſt. They inquired after all the monuments of learning there. They converſed with Prieſts, Philoſophers, Poets, with all who had acquired any diſtinguiſhed fame. They returned to their own country full of the diſcoveries which they had made, and fired by the new and uncommon objects which they had ſeen. Their knowledge and improvements coſt them more labour, raiſed in them more enthuſiaſm, were attended with higher rewards and honours, than in modern days. Fewer had the means and opportunities of diſtinguiſhing themſelves; but ſuch as did diſtinguiſh themſelves, were ſure of acquiring that fame, and even veneration, which is, of all rewards,

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rewards, the greateſt incentive to genius. Herodotus read his hiſtory to all Greece aſſembled at the Olympic games, and was publicly crowned. In the Peloponneſian war, when the Athenian army was defeated in Sicily, and the priſoners were ordered to be put to death, ſuch of them as could repeat any verſes of Euripides were ſaved, from honour to that Poet, who was a citizen of Athens. Theſe were teſtimonies of public regard, far beyond what modern manners confer upon genius.

In our times, good writing is conſidered as an attainment, neither ſo difficult nor ſo high and meritorious.

Scribimus indocti, doctique, Poëmata paſſim*.

We write much more ſupinely, and at our eaſe, than the Antients. To excel, is become a much leſs conſiderable object. Leſs effort, leſs exertion is required, becauſe we have many more aſſiſtances than they. Printing has rendered all books common, and eaſy to be had. Education for any of the learned profeſſions can be carried on without much trouble. Hence a mediocrity of genius is ſpread over all; but to riſe beyond that, and to overtop the crowd, is given to few. The multitude of aſſiſtances which we have for all kinds of compoſition, in the opinion of Sir

* "Now every deſperate blockhead dares to write,
"Verſe is the trade of every living wight."

FRANCIS.

William

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William Temple, a very competent judge, rather depreſſes than favours the exertions of native genius. "It is very poſſible," ſays that ingenious Author, in his Eſſay on the Antients and Moderns, "that men may loſe rather than "gain by theſe; may leſſen the force of their "own genius, by forming it upon that of others; "may have leſs knowledge of their own, for "contenting themſelves with that of thoſe be- "fore them. So a man that only tranſlates, ſhall "never be a Poet; ſo people that truſt to others "charity, rather than their own induſtry, will "be always poor. Who can tell," he adds, "whether learning may not even weaken inven- "tion, in a man that has great advantages from "nature? Whether the weight and number of "ſo many other men's thoughts and notions "may not ſuppreſs his own; as heaping on wood "ſometimes ſuppreſſes a little ſpark, that would "otherwiſe have grown into a flame? The "ſtrength of mind, as well as of body, grows "more from the warmth of exerciſe, than of "clothes; nay, too much of this foreign heat, "rather makes men faint, and their conſtitu- "tions weaker than they would be without "them."

From whatever cauſe it happens, ſo it is, that among ſome of the Antient Writers, we muſt look for the higheſt models in moſt of the kinds of elegant Compoſition. For accurate thinking and enlarged ideas, in ſeveral parts of Philoſophy, to the Moderns we ought chiefly to have recourſe.

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recourſe. Of correct and finiſhed writing in ſome works of taſte, they may afford uſeful patterns; but for all that belongs to original genius, to ſpirited, maſterly, and high execution, our beſt and moſt happy ideas are, generally ſpeaking, drawn from the Antients. In Epic Poetry, for inſtance, Homer and Virgil, to this day, ſtand not within many degrees of any rival. Orators, ſuch as Cicero and Demoſthenes, we have none. In Hiſtory, notwithſtanding ſome defects, which I am afterwards to mention in the Antient Hiſtorical Plans, it may be ſafely aſſerted, that we have no ſuch hiſtorical narration, ſo elegant, ſo pictureſque, ſo animated and intereſting, as that of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy, Tacitus, and Salluſt. Although the conduct of the drama may be admitted to have received ſome improvements, yet for Poetry and Sentiment we have nothing to equal Sphocles and Euripides; nor any dialogue in comedy, that comes up to the correct, graceful, and elegant ſimplicity of Terence. We have no ſuch Love Elegies as thoſe of Tibullus; no ſuch Paſtorals as ſome of Theocritus's: and for Lyric Poetry, Horace ſtands quite unrivalled. The name of Horace cannot be mentioned without a particular encomium. That "Curioſa Felicitas," which Petronius has remarked in his expreſſion; the ſweetneſs, elegance, and ſpirit of many of his Odes, the thorough knowledge of the world, the excellent ſentiments, and natural eaſy manner which diſtinguiſh his Satires and Epiſtles, all

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contribute to render him one of thoſe very few Authors whom one never tires of reading; and from whom alone, were every other monument deſtroyed, we ſhould be led to form a very high idea of the taſte and genius of the Auguſtan Age.

To all ſuch, then, as wiſh to form their taſte, and nouriſh their genius, let me warmly recommend the aſſiduous ſtudy of the Antient Claſſics, both Greek and Roman:

Nocturnâ verſate manu, verſate diurnâ*.

Without a conſiderable acquaintance with them, no man can be reckoned a polite ſcholar, and he will want many aſſiſtance for writing and ſpeaking well, which the knowledge of ſuch Authors would afford him. Any one has great reaſon to ſuſpect his own taſte, who receives little or no pleaſure from the peruſal of Writings, which ſo many ages and nations have conſented in holding up as objects of admiration. And I am perſuaded it will be found, that in proportion as the Antients are generally ſtudied and admired, or are unknown and diſregarded in any country, good taſte and good compoſition will flouriſh or decline. They are commonly none but the ignorant or ſuperficial who undervalue them.

At the ſame time, a juſt and high regard for the prime writers of antiquity is to be always

* "Read them by day, and ſtudy them by night."
FRANCIS.

diſtin-

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diſtinguiſhed, from that contempt of every thing which is Modern, and that blind veneration for all that has been written in Greek or Latin, which belongs only to pedants. Among the Greek and Roman Authors, ſome aſſuredly deſerve much higher regard than others; nay, ſome are of no great value. Even the beſt of them lie open occaſionally to juſt cenſure; for to no human performance is it given to be abſolutely perfect. We may, we ought therefore to read them with a diſtinguiſhing eye, ſo as to propoſe for imitation their beauties only; and it is perfectly conſiſtent with juſt and candid criticiſm, to find fault with parts, while at the ſame time, it admires the whole.

After theſe reflections on the Antients and Moderns, I proceed to a critical examination of the moſt diſtinguiſhed kinds of Compoſition, and the characters of thoſe Writers who have excelled in them whether Modern or Antient.

The moſt general diviſion of the different kinds of Compoſition is, into thoſe written in Proſe, and thoſe written in Verſe; which certainly require to be ſeparately conſidered, becauſe ſubject to ſeparate laws. I begin, as is moſt natural, with Writings in Proſe. Of Orations, or public Diſcourſes of all kinds, I have already treated fully. The remaining ſpecies of Proſe Compoſitions, which aſſume any ſuch regular form as to fall under the cognizance of criticiſm, ſeem to be chiefly theſe: Hiſtorical Writing,

Writing, Philoſophical Writing, Epiſtolary Writing, and Fictitious Hiſtory. Hiſtorical Compoſition ſhall be firſt conſidered; and, as it is an object of dignity, I propoſe to treat of it at ſome length. LECT. XXXV.

As it is the office of an Orator to perſuade, it is that of an Hiſtorian to record truth for the inſtruction of mankind. This is the proper object and end of hiſtory, from which may be deduced many of the laws relating to it; and if this object were always kept in view, it would prevent many of the errors into which perſons are apt to fall concerning this ſpecies of compoſition. As the primary end of hiſtory is to record truth, Impartiality, Fidelity, and Accuracy are the fundamental qualities of an Hiſtorian. He muſt neither be a panegyriſt nor a ſatiriſt. He muſt not enter into faction, nor give ſcope to affection; but, contemplating paſt events and characters with a cool and diſpaſſionate eye, muſt preſent to his Readers a faithful copy of human nature.

At the ſame time, it is not every record of facts, however true, that is entitled to the name of Hiſtory; but ſuch a record as enables us to apply the tranſactions of former ages for our own inſtruction. The facts ought to be momentous and important; repreſented in connection with their cauſes; traced to their effects; and unfolded in clear and diſtinct order. For wiſdom is the great end of Hiſtory. It is deſigned to

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ſupply the want of experience. Though it enforce not its inſtructions with the ſame authority, yet it furniſhes us with a greater variety of inſtructions, than it is poſſible for experience to afford in the courſe of the longeſt life. Its object is, to enlarge our views of the human character, and to give full exerciſe to our judgment on human affairs. It muſt not therefore be a tale calculated to pleaſe only, and addreſſed to the fancy. Gravity and dignity are eſſential characteriſtics of Hiſtory; no light ornaments are to be employed, no flippancy of ſtyle, no quaintneſs of wit. But the Writer muſt ſuſtain the character of a wiſe man, writing for the inſtruction of poſterity; one who has ſtudied to inform himſelf well, who has pondered his ſubject with care, and addreſſes himſelf to our judgment, rather than to our imagination. At the ſame time, Hiſtorical Writing is by no means inconſiſtent with ornamented and ſpirited narration. It admits of much high ornament and elegance; but the ornaments muſt be always conſiſtent with dignity; they ſhould not appear to be ſought after, but to riſe naturally from a mind animated by the events which it records.

Historical Compoſition is underſtood to comprehend under it, Annals, Memoirs, Lives. But theſe are its inferior ſubordinate ſpecies, on which I ſhall hereafter make ſome reflections, when I ſhall have firſt conſidered what belongs to a regular and legitimate work of Hiſtory. Such a work is chiefly of two kinds. Either the entire

entire Hiſtory of ſome ſtate or kingdom through its different revolutions, ſuch as Livy's Roman Hiſtory; or the Hiſtory of ſome one great event, or ſome portion or period of time which may be conſidered as making a whole by itſelf; ſuch as Thucydides's Hiſtory of the Peloponneſian War, Davila's Hiſtory of the Civil Wars of France, or Clarendon's of thoſe of England. LECT. XXXV.

In the conduct and management of his ſubject, the firſt attention requiſite in an Hiſtorian, is to give it as much unity as poſſible; that is, his Hiſtory ſhould not conſiſt of ſeparate unconnected parts merely, but ſhould be bound together by ſome connecting principle, which ſhall make the impreſſion on the mind of ſomething that is one, whole and entire. It is inconceivable how great an effect this, when happily executed, has upon a Reader, and it is ſurpriſing that ſome able Writers of Hiſtory have not attended to it more. Whether pleaſure or inſtruction be the end ſought by the ſtudy of Hiſtory, either of them is enjoyed to much greater advantage, when the mind has always before it the progreſs of ſome one great plan or ſyſtem of actions; when there is ſome point or centre, to which we can refer the various facts related by the Hiſtorian.

In general Hiſtories, which record the affairs of a whole nation or empire throughout ſeveral ages, this unity, I confeſs, muſt be more im-

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perfect. Yet even there, ſome degree of it can be preſerved by a ſkilful Writer. For though the whole, taken together, be very complex, yet the great conſtituent parts of it form ſo many ſubordinate wholes, when taken by themſelves; each of which can be treated both as complete within itſelf, and as connected with what goes before and follows. In the Hiſtory of a Monarch, for inſtance, every reign ſhould have its own unity; a beginning, a middle, and an end, to the ſyſtem of affairs; while, at the ſame time, we are taught to diſcern how that ſyſtem of affairs roſe from the preceding, and how it is inſerted into what follows. We ſhould be able to trace all the ſecret links of the chain, which binds together remote and ſeemingly unconnected events. In ſome kingdoms of Europe, it was the plan of many ſucceſſive Princes to reduce the power of their Nobles; and during ſeveral reigns, moſt of the leading actions had a reference to this end. In other ſtates, the riſing power of the Commons influenced, for a tract of time, the courſe and connection of public affairs. Among the Romans, the leading principle was a gradual extenſion of conqueſt, and the attainment of univerſal empire. The continual increaſe of their power, advancing towards this end from ſmall beginnings, and by a ſort of regular progreſſive plan, furniſhed to Livy a happy ſubject for hiſtorical unity, in the midſt of a great variety of tranſactions.

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Of all the ancient general hiſtorians, the one who had the moſt exact idea of this quality of Hiſtorical Compoſition, though in other reſpects not an elegant Writer, is Polybius. This appears from the account he gives of his own plan in the beginning of his third book; obſerving that the ſubject of which he had undertaken to write, is, throughout the whole of it, one action, one great ſpectacle; how, and by what cauſes, all the parts of the habitable world became ſubject to the Roman empire. "This action," ſays he, "is diſtinct in its beginning, deter- "mined in its duration, and clear in its final "accompliſhment; therefore, I think it of uſe "to give a general view beforehand of the chief "conſtituent parts which make up this whole." In another place, he congratulates himſelf on his good fortune, in having a ſubject for Hiſtory which allowed ſuch variety of parts to be united under one view; remarking, that before this period the affairs of the world were ſcattered and without connection; whereas, in the times of which he writes, all the great tranſactions of the world tended and verged to one point, and were capable of being conſidered as parts of one ſyſtem. Whereupon he adds ſeveral very judicious obſervations concerning the uſefulneſs of writing Hiſtory upon ſuch a comprehenſive and connected plan; comparing the imperfect degree of knowledge which is afforded by particular facts without general views, to the imperfect idea which one would entertain of an animal who had beheld its ſeparate parts only,

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without having ever ſeen its entire form and ſtructure *.

Such as write the hiſtory of ſome particular great tranſaction, as confine themſelves to one æra, or one portion of the hiſtory of a nation, have ſo great advantages for preſerving hiſtorical unity, that they are inexcuſable if they fail in it. Salluſt's Hiſtories of the Catilinarian and Jugurthine wars, Xenophon's Cyropædia, and his Retreat of the Ten Thouſand, are inſtances of particular Hiſtories, where the unity of hiſtorical object is perfectly well maintained. Thucydides, otherwiſe a writer of great ſtrength and dignity, has failed much, in this article, in his hiſtory of the Peloponneſian war. No one great object is properly purſued, and kept in view; but his narration is cut down into ſmall pieces, his hiſtory is divided by ſummers and winters, and

* Καθόλε μὶν γαρ ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν οἱ πεπεισμένοι διὰ της κατα μέρος ἱσορίας μετρίως συνόψέσθαι τὰ ὁλὰ, παραπλήσίον τι πάσχειν, ὡς ἄν εἴ τινες ἐμψύχε και καλῆ σώματος γεγονότος διερρεμένα τα μερη θεώμενοι, νομίζοιεν ἱκανῶς αυτόπται γιγνεσθαι της ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ τε ζώου και καλλονης ἐι γὰρ τις αὐτίκα μαλα συνθεὶς και τέλειον ἄυθις ἀπεργασαμενος το ζῶον, τῳ τε ειδει δε τῆ πῆς ψυχης ευπρεπεία, κἄπειτα παλιν επιδείκνυοι τοῖς αὐτοίς ἐκείνοις, ταχεως ἄν οἶμαι πάντας αὐτους ὁμολογήσειν δίο τι καὶ λίαν πολυ τι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπελείποντο προσθὲν, και παραπλήσιον τοῖς ὀνειρώτίουσιν ἦσαν. ἔννοιαν μὲν γὰρ λαβεῖν απο μερὲς τῶν ὅλων δυνατόν. ἐπισήμην δὲ καὶ γνώμην ἀτρεκῆ ἔχειν ἀδύνατον. δίο παντελῶς βραχυ τι νομιστέον συμβαλλεσθαι τήν κατὰ μέρος ἱσορίαν προς τήν τῶν ὁλων εμπειρίαν καὶ πίστιν, ἐκ μέν τοιγε τής απαντων προς ἄλληλα συμπλοκης καὶ παραθέσεως, ετι δ' ὁμοιότητος καὶ διαφορας μόνως ἄν τις ἐφίλοίλο καὶ δυνηθείη κατοπτευσας ἅμα καὶ το χρήσιμον καὶ το τερπνὸν, εκ της ἱσορίας λαβεῖν.

Polyb. Hiſtor. Prim.

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we are every now and then leaving tranſactions unfiniſhed, and are hurried from place to place, from Athens to Sicily, from thence to Peloponneſus, to Corcyra, to Mitylene, that we may be told of what is going on in all theſe places. We have a great many disjointed parts, and ſcattered limbs, which with difficulty we collect into one body; and through this faulty diſtribution and management of his ſubject, that judicious Hiſtorian becomes more tireſome, and leſs agreeable than he would otherwiſe be. For theſe reaſons he is ſeverely cenſured by one of the beſt Critics of antiquity, Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus*.

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* The cenſure which Dionyſius paſſes upon Thucydides, is in ſeveral articles carried too far. He blames him for the choice of his ſubject, as not ſufficiently ſplendid and agreeable, and as abounding too much in crimes and melancholy events, on which he obſerves that Thucydides loves to dwell. He is partial to Herodotus, whom, both for the choice and the conduct of his ſubject, he prefers to the other Hiſtorian. It is true, that the ſubject of Thucydides wants the gaiety and ſplendour of that of Herodotus; but it is not deficient in dignity. The Peloponneſian war was the conteſt between two great rival powers, the Athenian and Lacedemonian ſtates, for the empire of Greece. Herodotus loves to dwell on proſperous incidents, and retains ſomewhat of the amuſing manner of the ancient poetical hiſtorians. But Herodotus wrote to the Imagination, Thucydides writes to the Underſtanding. He was a grave reflecting man, well acquainted with human life; and the melancholy events and cataſtrophes, which he records, are often both the moſt intereſting parts of hiſtory, and the moſt improving to the heart.

The Critic's obſervations on the faulty diſtribution which Thucydides makes of his ſubject, are better founded, and

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The Hiſtorian muſt not indeed neglect chronological order, with a view to render his narration agreeable. He muſt give a diſtinct account of the dates and of the coincidence of facts. But he is not under the neceſſity of breaking off always in the middle of tranſactions, in order to inform us of what was happening elſewhere at the ſame time. He diſcovers no art, if he cannot form ſome connection among the affairs which he relates, ſo as to introduce them in a proper train. He will ſoon tire the reader, if he goes on recording, in ſtrict chronological order, a multitude of ſeparate tranſactions, connected by nothing elſe, but their happening at the ſame time.

Though the hiſtory of Herodotus be of greater compaſs than that of Thucydides, and comprehend a much greater variety of diſſimilar parts, he has been more fortunate in joining them together, and digeſting them into order. Hence

his preference of Herodotus, in this reſpect, is not unjuſt—Θυκυδιδης μεν τοις χρονοις ακολουθων, Ηροδοτος δε ταις ωεριοχαις των ωραγματων, γινεται Θυκυδιδης ασαφης και δυσωαρακολουθητος· ωολλων γαρ κατα το αυτο θερος και χειμωνα γινωμενων εν διαφοραις τοποις, ημιτελεις τας ωροτας ωραξεις καταλιπων, ετερων αωτεται των κατα το αυτο θερος και χειμωνα γινομενων. ωλανωμεθα δη καθαωερ εικος, και δυσκολως τοις δηλωμενοις ωαρακολουθωμεν. Συμβεβηκε Θυκυδιδη μιαν ὑποθεσιν λαβοντι ωολλα ωοιησαι μερη το ευ σωμα. Ηροδοτω δε τας ωολλας και ιδεν ενοχυιας ὑποθεσεις ωροειλομενω, συμφωνον εν σωμα ωεωοιηκεναι. With regard to Style, Dionyſius gives Thucydides the juſt praiſe of energy and brevity; but cenſures him on many occaſions, not without reaſon, for harſh and obſcure expreſſion, deficient in ſmoothneſs and eaſe.

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he is a more pleaſing writer, and gives a ſtronger impreſſion of his ſubject; though, in judgment and accuracy, much inferior to Thucydides. With digreſſions and epiſodes he abounds; but when theſe have any connection with the main ſubject, and are inſerted profeſſedly as epiſodes, the unity of the whole is leſs violated by them, than by a broken and ſcattered narration of the principal ſtory. Among the Moderns, the Preſident Thuanus has, by attempting to make the hiſtory of his own times too comprehenſive, fallen into the ſame error, of loading the Reader with a great variety of unconnected facts, going on together in different parts of the world; an Hiſtorian otherwiſe of great probity, candour, and excellent underſtanding; but through this want of unity, more tedious, and leſs intereſting than he would otherwiſe have been.

LECTURE XXXVI.

HISTORICAL WRITING.

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AFTER making ſome obſervations on the controverſy which has been often carried on concerning the comparative merit of the Antients and the Moderns, I entered, in the laſt Lecture, on the conſideration of Hiſtorical Writing. The general idea of Hiſtory is, a record of truth for the inſtruction of mankind. Hence ariſe the primary qualities required in a good Hiſtorian, impartiality, fidelity, gravity, and dignity. What I principally conſidered, was the unity which belongs to this ſort of Compoſition; the nature of which I have endeavoured to explain.

I PROCEED next to obſerve, that in order to fulfil the end of Hiſtory, the Author muſt ſtudy to trace to their ſprings the actions and events which he records. Two things are eſpecially neceſſary for his doing this ſucceſsfully; a thorough acquaintance with human nature, and political

political knowledge, or acquaintance with government. The former is neceſſary to account for the conduct of individuals, and to give juſt views of their character; the latter to account for the revolutions of government, and the operation of political cauſes on public affairs. Both muſt concur, in order to form a completely inſtructive Hiſtorian. LECT XXXVI.

With regard to the latter article, Political Knowledge, the antient Writers wanted ſome advantages which the Moderns enjoy; from whom, upon that account, we have a title to expect more accurate and preciſe information. The world, as I formerly hinted, was more ſhut up in ancient times, than it is now; there was then leſs communication among neighbouring ſtates; and by conſequence leſs knowledge of one another's affairs; no intercourſe by eſtabliſhed poſts, or by Ambaſſadors reſident at diſtant courts. The knowledge, and materials of the antient Hiſtorians, were thereby more limited and circumſcribed; and it is to be obſerved too, that they wrote for their own countrymen only; they had no idea of writing for the inſtruction of foreigners, whom they deſpiſed, or of the world in general; and hence they are leſs attentive to convey all that knowledge with regard to domeſtic policy, which we, in diſtant times, would deſire to have learned from them. Perhaps alſo, though in antient ages men were abundantly animated with the love of liberty, yet the full extent of the in-

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fluence of government, and of political cauſes, was not then ſo thoroughly ſcrutinized, as it has been in modern times; when a long experience of all the different modes of government has rendered men more enlightened and intelligent, with reſpect to public affairs.

To theſe reaſons it is owing, that though the antient Hiſtorians ſet before us the particular facts which they relate, in a very diſtinct and beautiful manner, yet ſometimes they do not give us a clear view of all the political cauſes, which affected the ſituation of affairs of which they treat. From the Greek Hiſtorians, we are able to form but an imperfect notion of the ſtrength, the wealth, and the revenues of the different Grecian ſtates; of the cauſes of ſeveral of thoſe revolutions that happened in their government; or of their ſeparate connections and interfering intereſts. In writing the Hiſtory of the Romans, Livy had ſurely the moſt ample field for diſplaying political knowledge, concerning the riſe of their greatneſs, and the advantages or defects of their government. Yet the inſtruction in theſe important articles, which he affords, is not conſiderable. An elegant Writer he is, and a beautiful relater of facts, if ever there was one; but by no means diſtinguiſhed for profoundneſs or penetration. Salluſt, when writing the hiſtory of a conſpiracy againſt the government, which ought to have been altogether a Political Hiſtory, has evidently attended more to the elegance of narra-

tion, and the painting of characters, than to the unfolding of ſecret cauſes and ſprings. Inſtead of that complete information, which we would naturally have expected from him, of the ſtate of parties in Rome, and of that particular conjuncture of affairs, which enabled ſo deſperate a profligate as Cataline to become ſo formidable to government, he has given us little more than a general declamatory account of the luxury and corruption of manners in that age, compared with the ſimplicity of former times.

I BY no means, however, mean to cenſure all the antient Hiſtorians as defective in political information. No hiſtorians can be more inſtructive than Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus. Thucydides is grave, intelligent, and judicious; always attentive to give very exact information concerning every operation which he relates; and to ſhew the advantages or diſadvantages of every plan that was propoſed and every meaſure that was purſued. Polybius excels in comprehenſive political views, in penetration into great ſyſtems, and in his profound and diſtinct knowledge of all military affairs. Tacitus is eminent for his knowledge of the human heart; is ſentimental and refined in a high degree; conveys much inſtruction with reſpect to political matters, but more with reſpect to human nature.

BUT when we demand from the Hiſtorian profound and inſtructive views of his ſubject, it is not meant that he ſhould be frequently interrupting

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rupting the courſe of his Hiſtory, with his own reflections and ſpeculations. He ſhould give us all the information that is neceſſary for our fully underſtanding the affairs which he records. He ſhould make us acquainted with the political conſtitution, the force, the revenues, the internal ſtate of the country of which he writes; and with its intereſts and connections in reſpect of neighbouring countries. He ſhould place us, as on an elevated ſtation, whence we may have an extenſive proſpect of all the cauſes that cooperate in bringing forward the events which are related. But having put into our hands all the proper materials for judgment, he ſhould not be too prodigal of his own opinions and reaſonings. When an Hiſtorian is much given to diſſertation, and is ready to philoſophiſe and ſpeculate on all that he records, a ſuſpicion naturally ariſes, that he will be in hazard of adapting his narrative of facts to favour ſome ſyſtem which he has formed to himſelf. It is rather by fair and judicious narration, that hiſtory ſhould inſtruct us, than by delivering inſtruction in an avowed and direct manner. On ſome occaſions, when doubtful points require to be ſcrutinized, or when ſome great event is in agitation, concerning the cauſes or circumſtances of which mankind have been much divided, the narrative may be allowed to ſtand ſtill for a little; the Hiſtorian may appear, and may with propriety enter into ſome weighty diſcuſſion. But he muſt take care not to cloy his Readers with ſuch diſcuſſions, by repeating them too often.

When

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When obſervations are to be made concerning human nature in general, or the peculiarities of certain characters, if the Hiſtorian can artfully incorporate ſuch obſervations with his narrative, they will have a better effect than when they are delivered as formal detached reflections. For inſtance: in the life of Agricola, Tacitus, ſpeaking of Domitian's treatment of Agricola, makes this obſervation; "Proprium humani "ingenii eſt, odiſſe quem læſeris*." The obſervation is juſt and well applied; but the form, in which it ſtands, is abſtract and philoſophical. A thought of the ſame kind has a finer effect elſewhere in the ſame Hiſtorian, when ſpeaking of the jealouſies which Germanicus knew to be entertained againſt him by Livia and Tiberius: "Anxius," ſays he, "occultis in ſe patrui "aviæque odiis, quorum cauſæ acriores quia "iniquæ †." Here a profound moral obſervation is made; but it is made, without the appearance of making it in form; it is introduced as a part of the narration, in aſſigning a reaſon for the anxiety of Germanicus. We have another inſtance of the ſame kind, in the account which he gives of a mutiny raiſed againſt Rufus, who was a "PræfectusCaſtrorum," on account of the ſevere labour which he impoſed on the

* "It belongs to human nature to hate the man whom you "have injured."

† "Uneaſy in his mind, on account of the concealed hatred "entertained againſt him by his uncle and grandmother, which "was the more bitter becauſe the cauſe of it was unjuſt."

ſoldiers.

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ſoldiers. "Quippe Rufus, diu manipularis, "dein centurio, mox caſtris præfectus, anti- "quam duramque militiam revocabat, vetus "operis & laboris, et eo immitior quia tolera- "verat*." There was room for turning this into a general obſervation, that they who have been educated and hardened in toils, are commonly found to be the moſt ſevere in requiring the like toils from others. But the manner in which Tacitus introduces this ſentiment as a ſtroke in the character of Rufus, gives it much more life and ſpirit. This Hiſtorian has a particular talent of intermixing after this manner, with the courſe of his narrative, many ſtriking ſentiments and uſeful obſervations.

LET us next proceed to conſider the proper qualities of Hiſtorical Narration. It is obvious, that on the manner of narration much muſt depend, as the firſt notion of Hiſtory is the recital of paſt facts; and how much one mode of recital may be preferable to another, we ſhall ſoon be convinced, by thinking of the different effects, which the ſame ſtory, when told by two different perſons, is found to produce.

THE firſt virtue of Hiſtorial Narration, is Clearneſs, Order, and due Connection. To attain

* "For Rufus, who had long been a common ſoldier, after- "wards a Centurion, and at length a general officer, reſtored "the ſevere military diſcipline of antient times. Grown old "amidſt toils and labours, he was the more rigid in impoſing "them, becauſe he had been accuſtomed to bear them."

this,

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this, the Hiſtorian muſt be completely maſter of his ſubject; he muſt ſee the whole as at one view; and comprehend the chain and dependence of all its parts, that he may introduce every thing in its proper place; that he may lead us ſmoothly along the tract of affairs which are recorded, and may always give us the ſatisfaction of ſeeing how one event ariſes out of another. Without this, there can be neither pleaſure nor inſtruction, in reading Hiſtory. Much for this end will depend on the obſervance of that unity in the general plan and conduct, which, in the preceding Lecture, I recommended. Much too will depend on the proper management of tranſitions, which forms one of the chief ornaments of this kind of writing, and is one of the moſt difficult in execution. Nothing tries an Hiſtorian's abilities more, than ſo to lay his train beforehand, as to make us paſs naturally and agreeably from one part of his ſubject to another; to employ no clumſy and awkward junctures; and to contrive ways and means of forming ſome union among tranſactions, which ſeem to be moſt widely ſeparated from one another.

In the next place, as Hiſtory is a very dignified ſpecies of Compoſition, gravity muſt always be maintained in the narration. There muſt be no meanneſs nor vulgarity in the ſtyle; no quaint, nor colloquial phraſes; no affectation of pertneſs, or of wit. The ſmart, or the ſneering manner of telling a ſtory, is inconſiſtent with

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the hiſtorical character. I do not ſay, that an Hiſtorian is never to let himſelf down. He may ſometimes do it with propriety, in order to diverſify the ſtrain of his narration, which, if it be perfectly uniform, is apt to become tireſome. But he ſhould be careful never to deſcend too far; and, on occaſions where a light or ludicrous anecdote is proper to be recorded, it is generally better to throw it into a note, than to hazard becoming too familiar by introducing it into the body of the work.

But an Hiſtorian may poſſeſs theſe qualities of being perſpicuous, diſtinct, and grave, and may notwithſtanding be a dull Writer; in which caſe we ſhall reap little benefit from his labours. We ſhall read him without pleaſure; or, moſt probably, we ſhall ſoon give over reading him at all. He muſt therefore ſtudy to render his narration intereſting; which is the quality that chiefly diſtinguiſhes a Writer of genius and eloquence.

Two things are eſpecially conducive to this; the firſt is, a juſt medium in the conduct of narration, between a rapid or crowded recital of facts, and a prolix detail. The former embarraſſes, and the latter tires us. An Hiſtorian that would intereſt us, muſt know when to be conciſe, and where he ought to enlarge; paſſing concisely over ſlight and unimportant events, but dwelling on ſuch as are ſtriking and conſiderable in their nature, or pregnant with conſequences;

ſequences ; preparing beforehand our attention to them, and bringing them forth into the moſt full and conſpicuous light. The next thing he muſt attend to, is a proper ſelection of the circumſtances belonging to thoſe events which he chooſes to relate fully. General facts make a ſlight impreſſion on the mind. It is by means of circumſtances and particulars properly choſen, that a narration becomes intereſting and affecting to the Reader. Theſe give life, body, and colouring to the recital of facts, and enable us to behold them as preſent, and paſſing before our eyes. It is this employment of circumſtances, in Narration, that is properly termed Hiſtorical Painting.

In all theſe virtues of narration, particularly in this laſt, of picturesque deſcriptive Narration, ſeveral of the Antient Hiſtorians eminently excel. Hence, the pleaſure that is found in reading Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy, Salluſt, and Tacitus. They are all conſpicuous for the art of Narration. Herodotus is, at all times, an agreeable Writer, and relates every thing with that *naiveté* and ſimplicity of manner, which never fails to intereſt the Reader. Though the manner of Thucydides be more dry and harſh, yet on great occaſions, as when he is giving an account of the Plague of Athens, the Siege of Platæa, the Sedition in Corcyra, the Defeat of the Athenians in Sicily, he diſplays a very ſtrong and maſterly power of deſcription. Xenophon's Cyropædia, and his

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Anabaſis, or retreat of the Ten Thouſand, are extremely beautiful. The circumſtances are finely ſelected, and the narration is eaſy and engaging: but his Hellenics, or Continuation of the Hiſtory of Thucydides, is a much inferior work. Salluſt's Art of Hiſtorical Painting in his Catilinarian, but, more eſpecially in his Jugurthine War, is well known; though his Style is liable to cenſure, as too ſtudied and affected.

Livy is more unexceptionable in his manner; and is excelled by no hiſtorian whatever in the Art of Narration; ſeveral remarkable examples might be given from him. His account, for inſtance, of the famous defeat of the Roman Army by the Samnites, at the Furcæ Caudinæ, in the beginning of the ninth book, affords one of the moſt beautiful exemplifications of Hiſtorical Painting, that is any where to be met with. We have firſt, an exact deſcription of the narrow paſs between two mountains, into which the enemy had decoyed the Romans. When they find themſelves caught, and no hope of eſcape left, we are made to ſee, firſt, their aſtoniſhment, next, their indignation, and then, their dejection, painted in the moſt lively manner, by ſuch circumſtances and actions as were natural to perſons in their ſituation. The reſtleſs and unquiet manner in which they paſs the night; the conſultations of the Samnites; the various meaſures propoſed to be taken; the meſſages be-

tween the two armies, all heighten the ſcene. At length, in the morning, the Conſuls return to the Camp, and inform them that they could receive no other terms but that of ſurrendering their arms, and paſſing under the yoke, which was conſidered as the laſt mark of ignominy for a conquered army. Part of what then follows, I ſhall give in the Author's own words. "Redin-
"tegravit luctum in caſtris conſulum adven-
"tus; ut vix ab iis abſtinerent manus, quorum
"temeritate in eum locum deducti eſſent. Alii
"alios intueri, contemplari arma mox tradenda,
"& inermes futuras dextras; proponere ſibimet
"ipſi ante oculos, jugum hoſtile, et ludibria
"victoris, et vultus ſuperbos, et per armatos
"inermium iter. Inde fædi agminis miſerabi-
"lem viam; per ſociorum urbes reditum in pa-
"triam ac parentes quo ſæpe ipſi triumphantes
"veniſſent. Se ſolos ſine vulnere, ſine ferro,
"ſine acie victos; ſibi non ſtringere licuiſſe gla-
"dios, non manum cum hoſte conſerere; ſibi ne-
"quicquam arma, nequicquam vires, nequicquam
"animos datos. Hæc frementibus, hora fatalis
"ignominiæ advenit. Jamprimùm cum ſingulis
"veſtimentis, inermes extra vallum abire juſſi.
"Tum a conſulibus abire lictores juſſi, paluda-
"mentaque detracta. Tantam hoc inter ipſos,
"qui paulo ante eos dedendos, lacerandoſque
"cenſuerant, miſerationem fecit, ut ſuæ quiſ-
"que conditionis oblitus, ab illa deformatione
"tantæ majeſtatis, velut ab nefando ſpectaculo,
"averteret oculos. Primi conſules, prope ſe-

 "minudi,

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* "The arrival of the Conſuls in the camp, wrought up their "paſſions to ſuch a degree, that they could ſcarcely abſtain "from laying violent hands on them, as by their raſhneſs they "had been brought into this ſituation. They began to look "on one another; to caſt a melancholy eye on their arms, "which were now to be ſurrendered, and on their right hands, "which were to become defenceleſs. The yoke under which "they were to paſs; the ſcoffs of the conquerors; and their "haughty looks when, diſarmed and ſtripped, they ſhould be "led through the hoſtile lines; all roſe before their eyes. They "then looked forward to the ſad journey which awaited them, "when they were to paſs as a vanquiſhed and diſgraced army "through the territories of their allies, by whom they had "often been beheld returning in triumph to their families and "native land. They alone, they muttered to one another, "without an engagement, without a ſingle blow, had been "conquered. To their hard fate it fell, never to have had it "in their power to draw a ſword, or to look an enemy in the "face; to them only, arms, ſtrength, and courage had been "given in vain. While they were thus giving vent to their in-"dignation, the fatal moment of their ignominy arrived. Firſt, "they were all commanded to come forth from the camp, with-"out armour, and in a ſingle garment. Next, orders were "given, that the Conſuls ſhould be left without their Lictors, "and that they ſhould be ſtripped of their robes. Such com-"miſeration did this affront excite among them, who, but a "little before, had been for delivering up thoſe very Conſuls to "the enemy, and for putting them to death, that every one "forgot his own condition, and turned his eyes aſide from this "infamous diſgrace, ſuffered by the conſular dignity, as from "a ſpectacle which was too deteſtable to be beheld. The "Conſuls, almoſt half-naked, were firſt made to paſs under the "yoke," &c.

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ried on with the ſame beauty, and full of pictu- LECT. XXXVI.
reſque circumſtances*.

TACITUS is another Author eminent for Hiſtorical Painting, though in a manner altogether different from that of Livy. Livy's deſcriptions are more full, more plain, and natural; thoſe of Tacitus conſiſt in a few bold ſtrokes. He ſelects one or two remarkable circumſtances, and ſets them before us in a ſtrong, and, generally, in a new and uncommon light. Such is the follow-

* The deſcription which Cæſar gives of the conſternation occaſioned in his camp, by the accounts which were ſpread among his troops, of the ferocity, the ſize, and the courage of the Germans, affords an inſtance of Hiſtorical Painting, executed in a ſimple manner; and, at the ſame time, exhibiting a natural and lively ſcene. "Dum paucos dies ad Veſon-
"tionem moratur, ex percunctatione noſtrorum, vocibuſque
"Gallorum ac mercatorum, qui ingenti magnitudine corporum
"Germanos, incredibili virtute, atque exercitatione in armis
"eſſe prædicabant; ſæpe numero ſeſe cum iis congreſſos, ne
"vultum quidem atque aciem oculorum ferre potuiſſe; tantus
"ſubito terror omnem exercitum occupavit, ut non mediocri-
"ter omnium mentes animoſque perturbaret. Hic primum
"ortus eſt a tribunis militum, ac præfectis, reliquiſque qui ex
"urbe, amicitiæ cauſa, Cæſarem ſecuti, ſuum periculum mi-
"ſerabantur, quod non magnum in re militari uſum habebant
"quorum alius, aliâ cauſâ illatâ quam ſibi ad proficiſcendum
"neceſſariam eſſe diceret, petebat ut ejus voluntate diſcedere
"liceret. Nonnulli pudore adducti, ut timoris ſuſpicionem
"vitarent remanebant. Hi neque vultum fingere, neque in-
"terdum lacrymas tenere poterant. Abditi in tabernaculis,
"aut ſuum fatum querebantur, aut cum familiaribus ſuis,
"commune periculum miſerabantur. Vulgo, totis caſtris teſta-
"menta obſignabantur." DE BELL. GALL. L. I.

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ing picture of the ſituation of Rome, and of the Emperor Galba, when Otho was advancing againſt him: "Agebatur huc illuc Galba, vario "turbæ fluctuantis impulſu, completis undique "baſilicis et templis, lugubri proſpectu. Neque "populi aut plebis ulla vox; ſed attoniti vultus, "et converſæ ad omnia aures. Non tumultus, "non quies; ſed quale magni metûs, et magnæ "iræ, ſilentium eſt*." No image in any Poet is more ſtrong and expreſſive than this laſt ſtroke of the deſcription: "Non tumultus, non quies; "ſed quale," &c. This is a conception of the ſublime kind, and diſcovers high genius. Indeed, throughout all his work, Tacitus ſhews the hand of a maſter. As he is profound in reflection, ſo he is ſtriking in deſcription, and pathetic in ſentiment. The Philoſopher, the Poet, and the Hiſtorian all meet in him. Though the period of which he writes may be reckoned unfortunate for an Hiſtorian, he has made it afford us many intereſting exhibitions of human nature. The relations which he gives of the deaths of ſeveral eminent perſonages are as affecting as the deepeſt tragedies. He paints with a glow-

* "Galba was driven to and fro by the tide of the multi-"tude, ſhoving him from place to place. The temples and "public buildings were filled with crowds of a diſmal appear-"ance. No clamours were heard, either from the citzens, or "from the rabble. Their countenances were filled with con-"ſternation; their ears were employed in liſtening with anxiety. "It was not a tumult; it was not quietneſs; it was the ſilence "of terror, and of wrath."

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ing pencil; and poſſeſſes, beyond all writers, the talent of painting, not to the imagination merely, but to the heart. With many of the moſt diſtinguiſhed beauties, he is, at the ſame time, not a perfect model for Hiſtory; and ſuch as have formed themſelves upon him, have ſeldom been ſucceſsful. He is to be admired, rather than imitated. In his reflections, he is too refined; in his ſtyle too conciſe, ſometimes quaint and affected, often abrupt and obſcure. Hiſtory ſeems to require a more natural, flowing, and popular manner.

The Antients employed one embelliſhment of Hiſtory which the Moderns have laid aſide, I mean Orations, which, on weighty occaſions, they put into the mouths of ſome of their chief perſonages. By means of theſe, they diverſified their hiſtory; they conveyed both moral and political inſtruction; and, by the oppoſite arguments which were employed, they gave us a view of the ſentiments of different parties. Thucydides was the firſt who introduced this method. The orations with which his Hiſtory abounds, and thoſe too of ſome other Greek and Latin Hiſtorians, are among the moſt valuable remains which we have of Antient Eloquence. How beautiful ſoever they are, it may be much queſtioned, I think, whether they find a proper place in Hiſtory. I am rather inclined to think that they are unſuitable to it. For they form a mixture which is unnatural in Hiſtory, of fiction with truth. We know that theſe Orations

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tions are entirely of the Author's own compoſition, and that he has introduced ſome celebrated perſon haranguing in a public place, purely that he might have an opportunity of ſhowing his own eloquence, or delivering his own ſentiments, under the name of that perſon. This is a ſort of poetical liberty which does not ſuit the gravity of hiſtory, throughout which an air of the ſtricteſt truth ſhould always reign. Orations may be an embelliſhment to Hiſtory; ſuch might alſo Poetical Compoſitions be, introduced under the name of ſome of the perſonages mentioned in the Narration, who were known to have poſſeſſed poetical talents. But neither the one nor the other finds a proper place in Hiſtory. Inſtead of inſerting formal Orations, the method adopted by later Writers ſeems better and more natural; that of the Hiſtorian, on ſome great occaſion, delivering, in his own perſon, the ſentiments and reaſonings of the oppoſite parties, or the ſubſtance of what was underſtood to be ſpoken in ſome public Aſſembly; which he may do without the liberty of fiction.

The drawing of characters is one of the moſt ſplendid, and, at the ſame time, one of the moſt difficult ornaments of Hiſtorical Compoſition. For characters are generally conſidered as profeſſed exhibitions of fine writing; and an Hiſtorian who ſeeks to ſhine in them, is frequently in danger of carrying refinement to exceſs, from a deſire of appearing very profound and penetrating. He brings together ſo many contraſts,

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and ſubtile oppoſitions of qualities, that we are rather dazzled with ſparkling expreſſions, than entertained with any clear conception of a human character. A Writer who would characteriſe in an inſtructive and maſterly manner, ſhould be ſimple in his ſtyle, and ſhould avoid all quaintneſs and affectation; at the ſame time, not contenting himſelf with giving us general outlines only, but deſcending into thoſe peculiarities which mark a character in its moſt ſtrong and diſtinctive features. The Greek Hiſtorians ſometimes give eulogiums, but rarely draw full and profeſſed characters. The two Antient Authors who have laboured this part of Hiſtorical Compoſition moſt, are Salluſt and Tacitus.

As Hiſtory is a ſpecies of Writing deſigned for the inſtruction of mankind, ſound morality ſhould always reign in it. Both in deſcribing characters, and in relating tranſactions, the Author ſhould always ſhow himſelf to be on the ſide of virtue. To deliver moral inſtruction in a formal manner, falls not within his province; but both as a good man, and as a good Writer, we expect that he ſhould diſcover ſentiments of reſpect for virtue, and an indignation at flagrant vice. To appear neutral and indifferent with reſpect to good and bad characters, and to affect a crafty and political, rather than a moral turn of thought, will, beſides other bad effects, derogate greatly from the weight of Hiſtorical Compoſition, and will render the ſtrain of it much

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much more cold and unintereſting. We are always moſt intereſted in the tranſactions which are going on, when our ſympathy is awakened by the ſtory, and when we become engaged in the fate of the actors. But this effect can never be produced by a Writer who is deficient in ſenſibility and moral feeling.

As the obſervations which I have hitherto made have moſtly reſpected the Antient Hiſtorians, it may naturally be expected that I ſhould alſo take ſome notice of the Moderns who have excelled in this kind of Writing.

The country in Europe where the Hiſtorical Genius has, in later ages, ſhone forth with moſt luſtre, beyond doubt, is Italy. The national character of the Italians ſeems favourable to it. They were always diſtinguiſhed as an acute, penetrating, reflecting people, remarkable for political ſagacity and wiſdom, and who early addicted themſelves to the arts of Writing. Accordingly, ſoon after the reſtoration of letters, Machiavel, Guicciardin, Davila, Bentivoglio, Father Paul, became highly conſpicuous for hiſtorical merit. They all appear to have conceived very juſt ideas of Hiſtory; and are agreeable, inſtructive, and intereſting Writers. In their manner of narration, they are formed upon the Antients; ſome of them, as Bentivoglio and Guicciardin, have, in imitation of them, introduced Orations into their Hiſtory. In the profoundneſs and diſtinctneſs of their political views, they

they may, perhaps, be eſteemed to have ſurpaſſed the Antients. Critics have, at the ſame time, obſerved ſome imperfections in each of them. Machiavel, in his Hiſtory of Florence, is not altogether ſo intereſting as one would expect an author of his abilities to be; either through his own defect, or through ſome unhappineſs in his ſubject, which led him into a very minute detail of the intrigues of one city. Guicciardin, at all times ſenſible and profound, is taxed for dwelling ſo long on the Tuſcan affairs as to be ſometimes tedious; a defect which is alſo imputed, occaſionally, to the judicious Father Paul. Bentivoglio, in his excellent Hiſtory of the Wars of Flanders, is accuſed for approaching to the florid and pompous manner; and Davila, though one of the moſt agreeable and entertaining Relaters, has manifeſtly this defect, of ſpreading a ſort of uniformity over all his characters, by repreſenting them as guided too regularly by political intereſt. But, although ſome ſuch objections may be made to theſe Authors, they deſerve, upon the whole, to be placed in the firſt rank of Modern Hiſtorical Writers. The Wars of Flanders, written in Latin by Famianus Strada, is a book of ſome note; but is not entitled to the ſame reputation as the works of the other Hiſtorians I have named. Strada is too violently partial to the Spaniſh cauſe; and too open a Panegyriſt of the Prince of Parma. He is florid, diffuſe, and an affected imitator of the manner and ſtyle of Livy.

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Among the French, as there has been much good Writing in many kinds, ſo alſo in the Hiſtorical. That ingenious nation, who have done ſo much honour to Modern Literature, poſſeſs, in an eminent degree, the talent of Narration. Many of their later Hiſtorical Writers are ſpirited, lively, and agreeable; and ſome of them not deficient in profoundneſs and penetration. They have not, however, produced any ſuch capital Hiſtorians as the Italians whom I mentioned above.

Our Iſland, till within theſe few years, was not eminent for its hiſtorical productions. Early, indeed, Scotland acquired reputation by means of the celebrated Buchanan. He is an elegant Writer, claſſical in his Latinity, and agreeable both in narration and deſcription. But one cannot but ſuſpect him to be more attentive to elegance, than to accuracy. Accuſtomed to form his political notions wholly upon the plans of antient governments, the feudal ſyſtem ſeems never to have entered into his thoughts; and as this was the baſis of the Scottiſh conſtitution, his political views are, of courſe, inaccurate and imperfect. When he comes to the tranſactions of his own times, there is ſuch a change in his manner of writing, and ſuch an aſperity in his ſtyle, that, on what ſide ſoever the truth lies with regard to thoſe dubious and long controverted facts which make the ſubject of that part of his work, it is impoſſible to clear him from being deeply tinctured with the ſpirit of party.

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Among the older Engliſh Hiſtorians, the moſt conſiderable is Lord Clarendon. Though he writes as the profeſſed apologiſt of one ſide, yet there appears more impartiality in his relation of facts than might at firſt be expected. A great ſpirit of virtue and probity runs through his work. He maintains all the dignity of an Hiſtorian. His ſentences, indeed, are often too long, and his general manner is prolix; but his ſtyle, on the whole, is manly; and his merit, as an Hiſtorian, is much beyond mediocrity. Biſhop Burnet is lively and perſpicuous; but he has hardly any other hiſtorical merit. His ſtyle is too careleſs and familiar for Hiſtory; his characters are, indeed, marked with a bold and ſtrong hand; but they are generally light and ſatirical; and he abounds ſo much in little ſtories concerning himſelf, that he reſembles more a Writer of Memoirs than of Hiſtory. During a long period, Engliſh Hiſtorical Authors ſeemed to aim at nothing higher than an exact relation of facts; till of late the diſtinguiſhed names of Hume, Robertſon, and Gibbon, have raiſed the Britiſh character, in this ſpecies of Writing, to high reputation and dignity.

I obſerved, in the preceding Lecture, that Annals, Memoirs, and Lives, are the inferior kinds of Hiſtorical Compoſition. It will be proper, before diſmiſſing this ſubject, to make a few obſervations upon them. Annals are commonly underſtood to ſignify a collection of facts, digeſted

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geſted according to chronological order; rather ſerving for the materials of Hiſtory, than aſpiring to the name of Hiſtory themſelves. All that is required, therefore, in a Writer of ſuch Annals, is to be faithful, diſtinct, and complete.

Memoirs denote a ſort of Compoſition, in which an Author does not pretend to give full information of all the facts reſpecting the period of which he writes, but only to relate what he himſelf had acceſs to know, or what he was concerned in, or what illuſtrates the conduct of ſome perſon, or the circumſtances of ſome tranſaction, which he chooſes for his ſubject. From a Writer of Memoirs, therefore, is not expected the ſame profound reſearch, or enlarged information, as from a Writer of Hiſtory. He is not ſubject to the ſame laws of unvarying dignity and gravity. He may talk freely of himſelf; he may deſcend into the moſt familiar anecdotes. What is chiefly required of him is, that he be ſprightly and intereſting; and, eſpecially, that he inform us of things that are uſeful and curious; that he convey to us ſome ſort of knowledge worth the acquiring. This is a ſpecies of Writing very bewitching to ſuch as love to write concerning themſelves, and conceive every tranſaction in which they had a ſhare to be of ſingular importance. There is no wonder, therefore, that a nation ſo ſprightly as the French ſhould, for two centuries paſt, have been pouring forth a whole flood of Memoirs; the

the greateſt part of which are little more than agreeable trifles. LECT. XXXVI.

Some, however, muſt be excepted from this general character; two in particular; the Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz, and thoſe of the Duke of Sully. From Retz's Memoirs, beſides the pleaſure of agreeable and lively narration, we may derive alſo much inſtruction, and much knowledge of human nature. Though his politics be often too fine ſpun, yet the Memoirs of a profeſſed factious leader, ſuch as the Cardinal was, wherein he draws both his own character, and that of ſeveral great perſonages of his time, ſo fully, cannot be read by any perſon of good ſenſe without benefit. The Memoirs of the Duke of Sully, in the ſtate in which they are now given to the Public, have great merit, and deſerve to be mentioned with particular praiſe. No Memoirs approach more nearly to the uſefulneſs, and the dignity of a full legitimate Hiſtory. They have this peculiar advantage, of giving us a beautiful diſplay of two of the moſt illuſtrious characters which hiſtory preſents; Sully himſelf, one of the ableſt and moſt incorrupt miniſters, and Henry IV. one of the greateſt and moſt amiable Princes of modern times. I know few books more full of virtue and of good ſenſe than Sully's Memoirs; few, therefore, more proper to form both the heads and the hearts of ſuch as are deſigned for public buſineſs, and action, in the world.

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Biography, or the Writing of Lives, is a very uſeful kind of Compoſition; leſs formal and ſtately than Hiſtory; but to the bulk of Readers, perhaps, no leſs inſtructive; as it affords them the opportunity of ſeeing the characters and tempers, the virtues and failings of eminent men fully diſplayed; and admits them into a more thorough and intimate acquaintance with ſuch perſons, than Hiſtory generally allows. For a Writer of Lives may deſcend, with propriety, to minute circumſtances, and familiar incidents. It is expected of him, that he is to give the private, as well as the public life, of the perſon whoſe actions he records; nay, it is from private life, from familiar, domeſtic, and ſeemingly trivial occurrences, that we often receive moſt light into the real character. In this ſpecies of Writing, Plutarch has no ſmall merit; and to him we ſtand indebted for much of the knowledge that we poſſeſs, concerning ſeveral of the moſt eminent perſonages of antiquity. His matter is, indeed, better than his manner; as he cannot lay claim to any peculiar beauty or elegance. His judgment too, and his accuracy, have ſometimes been taxed; but whatever defects of this kind he may be liable to, his Lives of Eminent Men will always be conſidered as a valuable treaſure of inſtruction. He is remarkable for being one of the moſt humane Writers of all antiquity; leſs dazzled than many of them are, with the exploits of valour and ambition; and fond of diſplaying his great men to us, in the more gentle lights of retirement and private life.

I cannot

I CANNOT conclude the ſubject of Hiſtory, without taking notice of a very great improvement which has, of late years, begun to be introduced into Hiſtorical Compoſition; I mean, a more particular attention than was formerly given to laws, cuſtoms, commerce, religion, literature, and every other thing that tends to ſhow the ſpirit and genius of nations. It is now underſtood to be the buſineſs of an able Hiſtorian to exhibit manners, as well as facts and events; and aſſuredly, whatever diſplays the ſtate and life of mankind, in different periods, and illuſtrates the progreſs of the human mind, is more uſeful and intereſting than the detail of ſieges and battles. The perſon, to whom we are moſt indebted for the introduction of this improvement into Hiſtory, is the celebrated M. Voltaire, whoſe genius has ſhone with ſuch ſurpriſing luſtre, in ſo many different parts of literature. His Age of Louis XIV. was one of the firſt great productions in this taſte; and ſoon drew throughout all Europe, that general attention, and received that high approbation, which ſo ingenious and eloquent a production merited. His Eſſay on the general Hiſtory of Europe, ſince the days of Charlemagne, is not to be conſidered either as a Hiſtory, or the proper plan of an Hiſtorical Work; but only as a ſeries of obſervations on the chief events that have happened throughout ſeveral centuries, and on the changes that ſucceſſively took place in the ſpirit and manners of different nations. Though, in ſome dates and facts, it may, perhaps, be inaccurate,

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and is tinged with thoſe particularities which unhappily diſtinguiſh Voltaire's manner of thinking on religious ſubjects, yet it contains ſo many enlarged and inſtructive views, as juſtly to merit the attention of all who either read or write the Hiſtory of thoſe ages.

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PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING — DIALOGUE — EPISTOLARY WRITING — FICTITIOUS HISTORY.

AS Hiſtory is both a very dignified ſpecies of Compoſition, and by the regular form which it aſſumes, falls directly under the laws of Criticiſm, I diſcourſed of it fully in the two preceding Lectures. The remaining ſpecies of Compoſition, in Proſe, afford leſs room for critical obſervation.

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PHILOSOPHICAL Writing, for inſtance, will not lead us into any long diſcuſſion. As the profeſſed object of Philoſophy is to convey inſtruction, and as they who ſtudy it are ſuppoſed to do ſo for inſtruction, not for entertainment, the ſtyle, the form, and dreſs of ſuch Writings, are leſs material objects. They are objects, however, that muſt not be wholly neglected. He who attempts to inſtruct mankind, without ſtudying, at the ſame time, to engage their attention, and to intereſt them in his ſubject by his manner of

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exhibiting it, is not likely to prove ſucceſsful. The ſame truths, and reaſonings, delivered in a dry and cold manner, or with a proper meaſure of elegance and beauty, will make very different impreſſions on the minds of men.

It is manifeſt that every Philoſophical Writer muſt ſtudy the utmoſt perſpicuity: and, by reflecting on what was formerly delivered on the ſubject of perſpicuity, with reſpect both to ſingle words, and the conſtruction of Sentences, we may be convinced that this is a ſtudy which demands conſiderable attention to the rules of Style, and good Writing. Beyond mere perſpicuity, ſtrict accuracy and preciſion are required in a Philoſophical Writer. He muſt employ no words of uncertain meaning, no looſe nor indeterminate expreſſions; and ſhould avoid uſing words which are ſeemingly ſynonymous, without carefully attending to the variation which they make upon the idea.

To be clear then and preciſe, is one requiſite which we have a title to demand from every Philoſophical Writer. He may poſſeſs this quality, and be at the ſame time a very dry Writer. He ſhould therefore ſtudy ſome degree of embelliſhment, in order to render his compoſition pleaſing and graceful. One of the moſt agreeable, and one of the moſt uſeful embelliſhments which a Philoſopher can employ, conſiſts in illuſtrations taken from hiſtorical facts, and the characters of men. All moral and political ſubjects naturally afford

afford ſcope for theſe; and wherever there is room for employing them, they ſeldom fail of producing a happy effect. They diverſify the Compoſition; they relieve the mind from the fatigue of mere reaſoning, and at the ſame time raiſe more full conviction than any reaſonings produce: for they take Philoſophy out of the abſtract, and give weight to Speculation, by ſhewing its connection with real life, and the actions of mankind. LECT. XXXVII.

Philosophical Writing admits beſides of a poliſhed, a neat, and elegant ſtyle. It admits of Metaphors, Compariſons, and all the calm Figures of Speech, by which an Author may convey his ſenſe to the underſtanding with clearneſs and force, at the ſame time that he entertains the imagination. He muſt take great care, however, that all his ornaments be of the chaſteſt kind, never partaking of the florid or the tumid; which is ſo unpardonable in a profeſſed Philoſopher, that it is much better for him to err on the ſide of naked ſimplicity, than on that of too much ornament. Some of the Antients, as Plato and Cicero, have left us Philoſophical Treatiſes compoſed with much elegance and beauty. Seneca has been long and juſtly cenſured for the affectation that appears in his Style. He is too fond of a certain brilliant and ſparkling manner; of antitheſis and quaint ſentences. It cannot be denied, at the ſame time, that he often expreſſes himſelf with much livelineſs and force; though his Style, upon the

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whole, is far from deſerving imitation. In Engliſh, Mr. Locke's celebrated Treatiſe on Human Underſtanding, may be pointed out as a model, on the one hand, of the greateſt clearneſs and diſtinctneſs of Philoſophical Style, with very little approach to ornament; Lord Shafteſbury's Writings, on the other hand, exhibit Philoſophy dreſſed up with all the ornament which it can admit; perhaps with more than is perfectly ſuited to it.

Philosophical Compoſition ſometimes aſſumes a form, under which it mingles more with works of taſte, when carried on in the way of Dialogue and Converſation. Under this form the Antients have given us ſome of their chief Philoſophical Works; and ſeveral of the Moderns have endeavoured to imitate them. Dialogue Writing may be executed in two ways, either as direct converſation, where none but the Speakers appear, which is the method that Plato uſes; or as the recital of a converſation, where the Author himſelf appears, and gives an account of what paſſed in diſcourſe; which is the method that Cicero generally follows. But though thoſe different methods make ſome variation in the form, yet the nature of the Compoſition is at bottom the ſame in both, and ſubject to the ſame laws.

A Dialogue, in one or other of theſe forms, on ſome philoſophical, moral, or critical ſubject, when it is well conducted, ſtands in a high rank

among the Works of Taſte; but is much more difficult in the execution than is commonly imagined. For it requires more, than merely the introduction of different perſons ſpeaking in ſucceſſion. It ought to be a natural and ſpirited repreſentation of real converſation; exhibiting the character and manners of the ſeveral Speakers, and ſuiting to the character of each that peculiarity of thought and expreſſion which diſtinguiſhes him from another. A Dialogue, thus conducted, gives the Reader a very agreeable entertainment; as by means of the debate going on among the perſonages, he receives a fair and full view of both ſides of the argument; and is, at the ſame time, amuſed with polite converſation, and with a diſplay of conſiſtent and well-ſupported characters. An Author, therefore, who has genius for executing ſuch a Compoſition after this manner, has it in his power both to inſtruct and to pleaſe.

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But the greateſt part of Modern Dialogue Writers have no idea of any Compoſition of this ſort; and bating the outward forms of converſation, and that one ſpeaks, and another anſwers, it is quite the ſame as if the Author ſpoke in perſon throughout the whole. He ſets up a Philotheus, perhaps, and a Philatheos, or an A and a B; who, after mutual compliments, and after admiring the fineneſs of the morning or evening, and the beauty of the proſpects around them, enter into conference concerning ſome grave matter; and all that we know farther of

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of them is, that the one perſonates the Author, a man of learning, no doubt, and of good principles; and the other is a man of ſtraw, ſet up to propoſe ſome trivial objections: over which the firſt gains a moſt entire triumph, and leaves his ſceptical antagoniſt at the end much humbled, and, generally, convinced of his error. This a very frigid and inſipid manner of writing; the more ſo, as it is an attempt toward ſomething, which we ſee the Author cannot ſupport. It is the form, without the ſpirit of converſation. The Dialogue ſerves no purpoſe, but to make aukward interruptions; and we ſhould with more patience hear the Author continuing always to reaſon himſelf, and to remove the objections that are made to his principles, than be troubled with the unmeaning appearance of two perſons, whom we ſee to be in reality no more than one.

Among the Antients, Plato is eminent for the beauty of his Dialogues. The ſcenery, and the circumſtances of many of them, are beautifully painted. The characters of the Sophiſts, with whom Socrates diſputed, are well drawn; a variety of perſonages are exhibited to us; we are introduced into a real converſation, often ſupported with much life and ſpirit, after the Socratic manner. For richneſs and beauty of imagination, no Philoſophic Writer, Antient or Modern, is comparable to Plato. The only fault of his imagination is, ſuch an exceſs of fertility as allows it ſometimes to obſcure his judgment. It frequently carries him into Allegory, Fiction,

Enthuſiaſm, and the airy regions of Myſtical Theology. The Philoſopher is, at times, loſt in the Poet. But whether we be edified with the matter or not, (and much edification he often affords,) we are always entertained with the manner; and left with a ſtrong impreſſion of the ſublimity of the Author's genius. LECT. XXXVII.

Cicero's Dialogues, or thoſe recitals of converſations which he has introduced into ſeveral of his Philoſophical and Critical Works, are not ſo ſpirited, nor ſo characteriſtical as thoſe of Plato. Yet ſome, as that "De Oratore" eſpecially, are agreeable and well ſupported. They ſhew us converſation carried on among ſome of the principal perſons of Ancient Rome, with freedom, good-breeding, and dignity. The Author of the elegant Dialogue "De Cauſis Corruptæ Eloquentiæ," which is annexed ſometimes to the works of Quinctilian, and ſometimes to thoſe of Tacitus, has happily imitated, perhaps has excelled Cicero, in this manner of writing.

Lucian is a Dialogue Writer of much eminence; though his ſubjects are ſeldom ſuch as can entitle him to be ranked among Philoſophical Authors. He has given the model of the light and humorous Dialogue, and has carried it to great perfection. A character of levity, and at the ſame time of wit and penetration, diſtinguiſhes all his writings. His great object was, to expoſe the follies of ſuperſtition, and the Pedantry

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Pedantry of Philoſophy, which prevailed in his age; and he could not have taken any more ſucceſsful method for this end, than what he has employed in his dialogues, eſpecially in thoſe of the Gods and of the Dead, which are full of pleaſantry and ſatire. In this invention of Dialogues of the Dead, he has been followed by ſeveral Modern Authors. Fontenelle, in particular, has given us Dialogues of this ſort, which are ſprightly and agreeable; but as for characters, whoever his perſonages be, they all become Frenchmen in his hands. Indeed few things in Compoſition are more difficult, than in the courſe of a Moral Dialogue to exhibit characters properly diſtinguiſhed. As calm converſation furniſhes none of thoſe aſſiſtances for bringing characters into light, which the active ſcenes, and intereſting ſituations of the Drama, afford. Hence few Authors are eminent for Characteriſtical Dialogue on grave ſubjects. One of the moſt remarkable in the Engliſh Language, is a Writer of the laſt age, Dr. Henry More, in his Divine Dialogues, relating to the foundations of Natural Religion. Though his Style be now in ſome meaſure obſolete, and his Speakers be marked with the Academic ſtiffneſs of thoſe times, yet the Dialogue is animated by a variety of character and a ſprightlineſs of Converſation, beyond what are commonly met with in Writings of this kind. Biſhop Berkeley's Dialogues concerning the exiſtence of matter, do not attempt any diſplay of Characters; but furniſh an inſtance of a very abſtract ſubject, rendered clear and intelligible

intelligible by means of Converſation properly managed. LECT. XXXVII.

I PROCEED next to make ſome obſervations on Epiſtolary Writing: which poſſeſſes a kind of middle place between the ſerious and amuſing ſpecies of Compoſition. Epiſtolary Writing appears, at firſt view, to ſtretch into a very wide field. For there is no ſubject whatever, on which one may not convey his thoughts to the Public, in the form of a letter. Lord Shafteſbury, for inſtance, Mr. Harris, and ſeveral other Writers, have choſen to give this form to philoſophical treatiſes. But this is not ſufficient to claſs ſuch treatiſes under the head of Epiſtolary Compoſition. Though they bear, in the title-page, a Letter to a Friend, after the firſt addreſs, the Friend diſappears, and we ſee that it is, in truth, the Public with whom the Author correſponds. Seneca's Epiſtles are of this ſort. There is no probability that they ever paſſed in correſpondence as real letters. They are no other than miſcellaneous diſſertations on moral ſubjects; which the Author, for his convenience, choſe to put into the epiſtolary form. Even where one writes a real letter on ſome formal topic, as of moral or religious conſolation to a perſon under diſtreſs, ſuch as Sir William Temple has written to the Counteſs of Eſſex on the death of her daughter, he is at liberty, on ſuch occaſions, to write wholly as a Divine or as a Philoſopher, and to aſſume the ſtyle and manner of one, without reprehenſion. We conſider the

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the Author not as writing a Letter, but as compoſing a Diſcourſe, ſuited particularly to the circumſtances of ſome one perſon.

Epistolary Writing becomes a diſtinct ſpecies of compoſition, ſubject to the cognizance of Criticiſm, only, or chiefly, when it is of the eaſy and familiar kind; when it is converſation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a diſtance. Such an intercourſe, when well conducted, may be rendered very agreeable to Readers of taſte. If the ſubject of the letters be important, they will be the more valuable. Even though there ſhould be nothing very conſiderable in the ſubject, yet if the ſpirit and turn of the correſpondence be agreeable; if they be written in a ſprightly manner, and with native grace and eaſe, they may ſtill be entertaining; more eſpecially if there be any thing to intereſt us, in the characters of thoſe who write them. Hence the curioſity which the Public has always diſcovered, concerning the Letters of eminent perſons. We expect in them to diſcover ſomewhat of their real character. It is childiſh indeed to expect, that in Letters we are to find the whole heart of the Author unveiled. Concealment and diſguiſe take place, more or leſs, in all human intercourſe. But ſtill, as Letters from one friend to another make the neareſt approach to converſation, we may expect to ſee more of a character diſplayed in theſe than in other productions, which are ſtudied for public view. We pleaſe ourſelves with beholding the writer

writer in a ſituation which allows him to be at his eaſe, and to give vent occaſionally to the overflowings of his heart.

Much, therefore, of the merit, and the agreeableneſs of Epiſtolary Writing, will depend on its introducing us into ſome acquaintance with the Writer. There, if any where, we look for the Man, not for the Author. Its firſt and fundamental requiſite is, to be natural and ſimple; for a ſtiff and laboured manner is as bad in a Letter as it is in Converſation. This does not baniſh ſprightlineſs and wit. Theſe are graceful in Letters, juſt as they are in Converſation; when they flow eaſily, and without being ſtudied; when employed ſo as to ſeaſon, not to cloy. One who, either in Converſation or in Letters, affects to ſhine and to ſparkle always, will not pleaſe long. The ſtyle of Letters ſhould not be too highly poliſhed. It ought to be neat and correct, but no more. All nicety about words, betrays ſtudy; and hence muſical periods, and appearances of number and harmony in arrangement, ſhould be carefully avoided in Letters. The beſt Letters are commonly ſuch as the Authors have written with moſt facility. What the heart or the imagination dictates, always flows readily; but where there is no ſubject to warm or intereſt theſe, conſtraint appears; and hence, thoſe Letters of mere compliment, congratulation, or affected condolence, which have coſt the Authors moſt labour in compoſing, and which, for that reaſon, they perhaps conſider as their

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their maſter-pieces, never fail of being the moſt diſagreeable and inſipid to the Readers.

It ought, at the ſame time, to be remembered, that the eaſe and ſimplicity which I have recommended in Epiſtolary Correſpondence, are not to be underſtood as importing entire careleſſneſs. In writing to the moſt intimate friend, a certain degree of attention, both to the ſubject and the ſtyle, is requiſite and becoming. It is no more than what we owe both to ourſelves, and to the friend with whom we correſpond. A ſlovenly and negligent manner of Writing, is a diſobliging mark of want of reſpect. The liberty, beſides, of writing Letters with too careleſs a hand, is apt to betray perſons into imprudence in what they write. The firſt requiſite, both in converſation and correſpondence, is to attend to all the proper decorums which our own character, and that of others, demand. An imprudent expreſſion in converſation may be forgotten and paſs away; but when we take the pen into our hand, we muſt remember, that, "Litera ſcripta manet."

Pliny's Letters are one of the moſt celebrated collections which the Antients have given us, in the epiſtolary way. They are elegant and polite; and exhibit a very pleaſing and amiable view of the author. But, according to the vulgar phraſe, they ſmell too much of the lamp. They are too elegant and fine; and it is not eaſy to avoid thinking, that the Author is caſting

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caſting an eye towards the Public, when he is appearing to write only for his friends. Nothing indeed is more difficult, than for an Author, who publiſhes his own Letters, to diveſt himſelf altogether of attention to the opinion of the world in what he ſays; by which means, he becomes much leſs agreeable than a man of parts would be, if, without any conſtraint of this ſort, he were writing to his intimate friend.

CICERO's Epiſtles, though not ſo ſhowy as thoſe of Pliny, are, on ſeveral accounts, a far more valuable collection; indeed, the moſt valuable collection of Letters extant in any language. They are Letters of real buſineſs, written to the greateſt men of the age, compoſed with purity and elegance, but without the leaſt affectation; and, what adds greatly to their merit, written without any intention of being publiſhed to the world. For it appears, that Cicero never kept copies of his own Letters; and we are wholly indebted to the care of his freed-man Tyro for the large collection that was made, after his death, of thoſe which are now extant, amounting to near a thouſand*. They contain the moſt authentic materials of the hiſtory of that age; and are the laſt monuments

* See his Letter to Atticus, which was written a year or two before his death, in which he tells him, in anſwer to ſome enquiries concerning his Epiſtles, that he had no collection of them, and that Tyro had only about ſeventy of them.

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which remain of Rome in its free ſtate; the greateſt part of them being written during that important criſis, when the Republic was on the point of ruin; the moſt intereſting ſituation, perhaps, which is to be found in the affairs of mankind. To his intimate friends, eſpecially to Atticus, Cicero lays open himſelf and his heart, with entire freedom. In the courſe of his correſpondence with others, we are introduced into acquaintance with ſeveral of the principal perſonages of Rome; and it is remarkable, that moſt of Cicero's correſpondents, as well as himſelf, are elegant and polite Writers; which ſerves to heighten our idea of the taſte and manners of that age.

The moſt diſtinguiſhed Collection of Letters in the Engliſh Language, is that of Mr. Pope, Dean Swift, and their friends; partly publiſhed in Mr. Pope's Works, and partly in thoſe of Dean Swift. This collection is, on the whole, an entertaining and agreeable one; and contains much wit and refinement. It is not, however, altogether free from the fault which I imputed to Pliny's Epiſtles, of too much ſtudy and refinement. In the variety of Letters from different perſons, contained in that Collection, we find many that are written with eaſe, and a beautiful ſimplicity. Thoſe of Dr. Arbuthnot, in particular, always deſerve that praiſe. Dean Swift's alſo are unaffected; and as a proof of their being ſo, they exhibit his character fully, with all its defects; though it were to be wiſhed,

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for the honour of his memory, that his Epiſtolary Correſpondence had not been drained to the dregs, by ſo many ſucceſſive publications as have been given to the world. Several of Lord Bolingbroke's, and of Biſhop Atterbury's Letters, are maſterly. The cenſure of writing Letters in too artificial a manner falls heavieſt on Mr. Pope himſelf. There is viſibly more ſtudy, and leſs of nature and the heart in his Letters, than in thoſe of ſome of his correſpondents. He had formed himſelf on the manner of Voiture, and is too fond of writing like a wit. His Letters to Ladies are full of affectation. Even in writing to his friends, how forced an Introduction is the following, of a letter to Mr. Addiſon: "I am more joyed at your return, than I ſhould "be at that of the Sun, as much as I wiſh for "him in this melancholy wet ſeaſon; but it is "his fate too, like your's, to be diſpleaſing to "owls and obſcene animals, who cannot bear "his luſtre." How ſtiff a compliment it is which he pays to Biſhop Atterbury! "Though "the noiſe and daily buſtle for the Public be "now over, I dare ſay you are ſtill tendering "its welfare; as the Sun in winter, when ſeeming "to retire from the world, is preparing "warmth and benedictions for a better ſeaſon." This ſentence might be tolerated in a harangue; but is very unſuitable to the Style of one friend corresponding with another.

The gaiety and vivacity of the French genius appear to much advantage in their Letters, and

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have given birth to ſeveral agreeable publications. In the laſt age, Balzac and Voiture were the two moſt celebrated Epiſtolary Writers. Balzac's reputation indeed ſoon declined, on account of his ſwelling periods and pompous Style. But Voiture continued long a favourite Author. His Compoſition is extremely ſparkling; he ſhows a great deal of wit, and can trifle in the moſt entertaining manner. His only fault is, that he is too open and profeſſed a wit to be thoroughly agreeable as a Letter Writer. The Letters of Madam de Sevignè are now eſteemed the moſt accompliſhed model of a familiar correſpondence. They turn indeed very much upon trifles, the incidents of the day, and the news of the town; and they are overloaded with extravagant compliments, and expreſſions of fondneſs, to her favourite daughter; but withal, they ſhow ſuch perpetual ſprightlineſs, they contain ſuch eaſy and varied narration, and ſo many ſtrokes of the moſt lively and beautiful painting, perfectly free from any affectation, that they are juſtly entitled to high praiſe. The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague are not unworthy of being named after thoſe of Mad. de Sevignè. They have much of the French eaſe and vivacity; and retain more the character of agreeable Epiſtolary Style, than perhaps any Letters which have appeared in the Engliſh language.

THERE remains to be treated of, another Species of Compoſition in Proſe, which comprehends

hends a very numerous, though, in general, a very inſignificant claſs of Writings, known by the name of Romances and Novels. Theſe may, at firſt view, ſeem too inſignificant to deſerve that any particular notice ſhould be taken of them. But I cannot be of this opinion. Mr. Fletcher of Salton, in one of his Tracts, quotes it as the ſaying of a wiſe man, that give him the making of all the ballads of a nation, he would allow any one that pleaſed to make their laws. The ſaying was founded on reflection and good ſenſe, and is applicable to the ſubject now before us. For any kind of Writing, how trifling ſoever in appearance, that obtains a general currency, and eſpecially that early pre-occupies the imagination of the youth of both ſexes, muſt demand particular attention. Its influence is likely to be conſiderable, both on the morals and taſte of a nation.

In fact, Fictitious Hiſtories might be employed for very uſeful purpoſes. They furniſh one of the beſt channels for conveying inſtruction, for painting human life and manners, for ſhowing the errors into which we are betrayed by our paſſions, for rendering virtue amiable and vice odious. The effect of well-contrived ſtories, towards accompliſhing theſe purpoſes, is ſtronger than any effect that can be produced by ſimple and naked inſtruction; and hence we find, that the wiſeſt men in all ages have more or leſs employed fables and fictions, as the vehicles of knowledge. Theſe have ever been the baſis of

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both Epic and Dramatic Poetry. It is not, therefore, the nature of this ſort of Writing, conſidered in itſelf, but the faulty manner of its execution, that can expoſe it to any contempt. Lord Bacon takes notice of our taſte for Fictitious Hiſtory, as a proof of the greatneſs and dignity of the human mind. He obſerves very ingeniouſly, that the objects of this world, and the common train of affairs which we behold going on in it, do not fill the mind, nor give it entire ſatisfaction. We ſeek for ſomething that ſhall expand the mind in a greater degree: we ſeek for more heroic and illuſtrious deeds, for more diverſified and ſurpriſing events, for a more ſplendid order of things, a more regular and juſt diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments than what we find here: becauſe we meet not with theſe in true hiſtory, we have recourſe to fictitious. We create worlds according to our fancy, in order to gratify our capacious deſires: "Accommodando," ſays that great Philoſopher, "rerum "ſimulachra ad animi deſideria, non ſubmittendo animum rebus, quod ratio facit, et hiſtoria*." Let us then, ſince the ſubject wants neither dignity nor uſe, make a few obſervations on the riſe and progreſs of Fictitious Hiſtory, and the different forms it has aſſumed in different countries.

* "Accommodating the appearances of things to the deſires "of the mind, not bringing down the mind, as hiſtory and "philoſophy do, to the courſe of events."

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In all countries we find its origin very antient. The genius of the Eaſtern nations, in particular, was from the earlieſt times much turned towards invention and the love of fiction. Their Divinity, their Philoſophy, and their Politics, were clothed in fables and parables. The Indians, the Perſians, and Arabians, were all famous for their tales. The "Arabian Night's "Entertainments" are the production of a romantic invention, but of a rich and amuſing imagination; exhibiting a ſingular and curious diſplay of manners and characters, and beautified with a very humane morality. Among the antient Greeks, we hear of the Ionian and Mileſian Tales; but they have now periſhed; and, from any account that we have of them, appear to have been of the looſe and wanton kind. Some Fictitious Hiſtories yet remain, that were compoſed during the decline of the Roman Empire, by Apuleius, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus biſhop of Trica, in the fourth century; but none of them are conſiderable enough to merit particular criticiſms.

During the dark ages, this ſort of writing aſſumed a new and very ſingular form, and for a long while made a great figure in the world. The martial ſpirit of thoſe nations, among whom the feudal government prevailed; the eſtabliſhment of ſingle combat, as an allowed method of deciding cauſes both of juſtice and honour; the appointment of champions in the cauſe of women, who could not maintain their own rights

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by the ſword; together with the inſtitution of military tournaments, in which different kingdoms vied with one another, gave riſe, in thoſe times, to that marvellous ſyſtem of chivalry, which is one of the moſt ſingular appearances in the hiſtory of mankind. Upon this were founded thoſe romances of knight-errantry, which carried an ideal chivalry to a ſtill more extravagant height than it had riſen in fact. There was diſplayed in them a new and very wonderful ſort of world, hardly bearing any reſemblance to the world in which we dwell. Not only knights ſetting forth to redreſs all manner of wrongs, but in every page, magicians, dragons, and giants, invulnerable men, winged horſes, enchanted armour, and enchanted caſtles; adventures abſolutely incredible, yet ſuited to the groſs ignorance of theſe ages, and to the legends, and ſuperſtitious notions concerning magic and necromancy, which then prevailed. This merit they had, of being writings of the highly moral and heroic kind. Their knights were patterns, not of courage merely, but of religion, generoſity, courteſy, and fidelity; and the heroines were no leſs diſtinguiſhed for modeſty, delicacy, and the utmoſt dignity of manners.

These were the firſt Compoſitions that received the name of Romances. The origin of this name is traced, by Mr. Huet, the learned biſhop of Avranche, to the Provençal Troubadoures, a ſort of ſtory-tellers and bards in the county

county of Provence, where there ſubſiſted ſome remains of literature and poetry. The language which prevailed in that country was a mixture of Latin and Gallic, called the Roman or Romance Language; and, as the ſtories of thoſe Troubadoures were written in that language, hence it is ſaid the name of Romance, which we now apply to all fictitious Compoſition. LECT. XXXVII.

The earlieſt of theſe Romances is that which goes under the name of Turpin, the archbiſhop of Rheims, written in the 11th century. The ſubject is, the Atchievements of Charlemagne and his Peers, or Paladins, in driving the Saracens out of France and part of Spain; the ſame ſubject which Arioſto has taken for his celebrated poem of Orlando Furioſo, which is truly a Chivalry Romance, as extravagant as any of the reſt, but partly heroic, and partly comic, embelliſhed with the higheſt graces of poetry. The Romance of Turpin was followed by Amadis de Gaul, and many more of the ſame ſtamp. The Cruſades both furniſhed new matter, and increaſed the ſpirit for ſuch Writings; the Chriſtians againſt the Saracens made the common ground-work of them; and from the 11th to the 16th century they continued to bewitch all Europe. In Spain, where the taſte for this ſort of writing had been moſt greedily caught, the ingenious Cervantes, in the beginning of the laſt century, contributed greatly to explode it; and the abolition of tournaments, the prohibition of ſingle combat, the diſbelief of magic and enchant-

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enchantments, and the change in general of manners throughout Europe, began to give a new turn to fictitious Compoſition.

Then appeared the Aſtræa of D'urfé, the Grand Cyrus, the Clelia and Cleopatra of Mad. Scuderi, the Arcadia of Sir Philip Sidney, and other grave and ſtately Compoſitions in the ſame ſtyle. Theſe may be conſidered as forming the ſecond ſtage of Romance writing. The heroiſm and the gallantry, the moral and virtuous turn of the chivalry romance, were ſtill preſerved; but the dragons, the necromancers, and the enchanted caſtles, were baniſhed, and ſome ſmall reſemblance to human nature was introduced. Still, however, there was too much of the marvellous in them to pleaſe an age which now aſpired to refinement. The characters were diſcerned to be ſtrained; the ſtyle to be ſwoln; the adventures incredible; the books themſelves were voluminous and tedious.

Hence, this ſort of Compoſition ſoon aſſumed a third form, and from magnificent Heroic Romance, dwindled down to the Familiar Novel. Theſe novels, both in France and England, during the age of Lewis XIV. and King Charles II., were in general of a trifling nature, without the appearance of moral tendency, or uſeful inſtruction. Since that time, however, ſomewhat better has been attempted, and a degree of reformation introduced into the ſpirit of Novel Writing. Imitations of life and character

ter have been made their principal object. Relations have been profeſſed to be given of the behaviour of perſons in particular intereſting ſituations, ſuch as may actually occur in life; by means of which, what is laudable or defective in character and conduct, may be pointed out, and placed in an uſeful light. Upon this plan, the French have produced ſome compoſitions of conſiderable merit. Gil Blas, by Le Sage, is a book full of good ſenſe, and inſtructive knowledge of the world. The works of Marivaux, eſpecially his Marianne, diſcover great refinement of thought, great penetration into human nature, and paint with a very delicate pencil, ſome of the niceſt ſhades and features in the diſtinction of characters. The Nouvelle Heloiſe of Rouſſeau is a production of a very ſingular kind; in many of the events which are related, improbable and unnatural; in ſome of the details tedious, and for ſome of the ſcenes which are deſcribed juſtly blameable; but withal, for the power of eloquence, for tenderneſs of ſentiment, for ardour of paſſion, entitled to rank among the higheſt productions of Fictitious Hiſtory.

In this kind of Writing we are, it muſt be confeſſed, in Great Britain, inferior to the French. We neither relate ſo agreeably, nor draw characters with ſo much delicacy; yet we are not without ſome performances which diſcover the ſtrength of the Britiſh genius. No fiction, in any language, was ever better ſupported

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ported than the Adventures of Robinſon Cruſoe. While it is carried on with that appearance of truth and ſimplicity, which takes a ſtrong hold of the imagination of all Readers, it ſuggeſts, at the ſame time, very uſeful inſtruction; by ſhowing how much the native powers of man may be exerted for ſurmounting the difficulties of any external ſituation. Mr. Fielding's Novels are highly diſtinguiſhed for their humour; a humour which, if not of the moſt refined and delicate kind, is original, and peculiar to himſelf. The characters which he draws are lively and natural, and marked with the ſtrokes of a bold pencil. The general ſcope of his ſtories is favourable to humanity and goodneſs of heart; and in Tom Jones, his greateſt work, the artful conduct of the fable, and the ſubſerviency of all the incidents to the winding up of the whole, deſerve much praiſe. The moſt moral of all our Novel Writers is Richardſon, the Author of Clariſſa, a writer of excellent intentions, and of very conſiderable capacity and genius; did he not poſſeſs the unfortunate talent of ſpinning out pieces of amuſement into an immeaſurable length. The trivial performances which daily appear in public under the title of Lives, Adventures, and Hiſtories, by anonymous Authors, if they be often innocent, yet are moſt commonly inſipid; and though in the general it ought to be admitted that Characteriſtical Novels, formed upon Nature and upon Life, without extravagance, and without licentiouſneſs, might furniſh an agreeable and uſeful entertain-

tertainment to the mind; yet conſidering the manner in which theſe Writings have been, for the moſt part, conducted, it muſt alſo be confeſſed, that they oftener tend to diſſipation and idleneſs, than to any good purpoſe. Let us now, therefore, make our retreat from theſe regions of fiction.

LECTURE XXXVIII.

NATURE OF POETRY — ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS — VERSIFICATION.

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I HAVE now finiſhed my obſervations on the different kinds of Writing in Proſe. What remains is, to treat of Poetical Compoſition. Before entering on the conſideration of any of its particular kinds, I deſign this Lecture as an Introduction to the ſubject of Poetry in general; wherein I ſhall treat of its nature, give an account of its origin, and make ſome obſervations on Verſification, or Poetical Numbers.

OUR firſt enquiry muſt be, what is Poetry? and wherein does it differ from Proſe? The anſwer to this queſtion is not ſo eaſy as might at firſt be imagined; and Critics have differed and diſputed much concerning the proper definition of Poetry. Some have made its eſſence to conſiſt in fiction, and ſupport their opinion by the authority of Ariſtotle and Plato. But this is certainly too limited a definition; for though fiction

fiction may have a great ſhare in many Poetical Compoſitions, yet many ſubjects of Poetry may not be feigned; as where the Poet deſcribes objects which actually exiſt, or pours forth the real ſentiments of his own heart. Others have made the characteriſtic of Poetry to lie in imitation. But this is altogether looſe; for ſeveral other arts imitate as well as Poetry; and an imitation of human manners and characters, may be carried on in the humbleſt Proſe, no leſs than in the more lofty Poetic ſtrain.

The moſt juſt and comprehenſive definition which, I think, can be given of Poetry, is, "That it is the language of paſſion, or of enli-"vened imagination, formed, moſt commonly, "into regular numbers." The Hiſtorian, the Orator, the Philoſopher, addreſs themſelves, for the moſt part, primarily to the underſtanding: their direct aim is to inform, to perſuade, or to inſtruct. But the primary aim of a Poet is to pleaſe, and to move; and, therefore, it is to the Imagination, and the Paſſions, that he ſpeaks. He may, and he ought to have it in his view, to inſtruct and to reform; but it is indirectly, and by pleaſing and moving, that he accompliſhes this end. His mind is ſuppoſed to be animated by ſome intereſting object which fires his Imagination, or engages his Paſſions; and which, of courſe, communicates to his Style a peculiar elevation ſuited to his ideas; very different from that mode of expreſſion, which is natural to the mind in its calm, ordinary ſtate. I have added to my defi-

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definition, that this language of Paſſion, or imagination, is formed, *moſt commonly*, into regular numbers; becauſe, though Verſification be, in general, the exterior diſtinction of Poetry, yet there are ſome forms of Verſe ſo looſe and familiar, as to be hardly diſtinguiſhable from Proſe; ſuch as the Verſe of Terence's Comedies; and there is alſo a ſpecies of Proſe, ſo meaſured in its cadence, and ſo much raiſed in its tone, as to approach very near to Poetical Numbers; ſuch as the Telemachus of Fenelon; and the Engliſh Tranſlation of Oſſian. The truth is, Verſe and Proſe, on ſome occaſions, run into one another, like light and ſhade. It is hardly poſſible to determine the exact limit where Eloquence ends, and Poetry begins; nor is there any occaſion for being very preciſe about the boundaries, as long as the nature of each is underſtood. Theſe are the minutiæ of Criticiſm, concerning which frivolous Writers are always diſpoſed to ſquabble; but which deſerve not any particular diſcuſſion. The truth and juſtneſs of the definition, which I have given of Poetry, will appear more fully from the account which I am now to give of its origin, and which will tend to throw light on much of what I am afterwards to deliver, concerning its various kinds.

The Greeks, ever fond of attributing to their own nation the invention of all ſciences and arts, have aſcribed the origin of Poetry to Orpheus, Linus, and Muſæus. There were,

perhaps, ſuch perſons as theſe, who were the firſt diſtinguiſhed bards in the Grecian Countries. But long before ſuch names were heard of, and among nations where they were never known, Poetry exiſted. It is a great error to imagine, that Poetry and Muſic are Arts which belong only to poliſhed nations. They have their foundation in the nature of man, and belong to all nations, and to all ages; though, like other arts founded in nature, they have been more cultivated, and, from a concurrence of favourable circumſtances, carried to greater perfection in ſome countries, than in others. In order to explore the riſe of Poetry, we muſt have recourſe to the deſerts and the wilds; we muſt go back to the age of hunters and of ſhepherds; to the higheſt antiquity: and to the ſimpleſt form of manners among mankind.

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It has been often ſaid, and the concurring voice of all antiquity affirms, that Poetry is older than Proſe. But in what ſenſe this ſeemingly ſtrange Paradox holds true, has not always been well underſtood. There never, certainly, was any period of ſociety in which men converſed together in Poetical numbers. It was in very humble and ſcanty Proſe, as we may eaſily believe, that the firſt tribes carried on intercourſe among themſelves, relating to the wants and neceſſities of life. But from the very beginning of Society, there were occaſions on which they met together for feaſts, ſacrifices, and public aſſemblies; and on all ſuch occaſions, it is well

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known, that muſic, ſong, and dance, made their principal entertainment. It is chiefly in America, that we have had the opportunity of being made acquainted with men in their ſavage ſtate. We learn from the particular and concurring accounts of Travellers, that, among all the nations of that vaſt continent, eſpecially among the Northern Tribes, with whom we have had moſt intercourſe, muſic and ſong are, at all their meetings, carried on with an incredible degree of enthuſiam; that the Chiefs of the Tribe are thoſe who ſignalize themſelves moſt on ſuch occaſions; that it is in ſongs they celebrate their religious rites; that, by theſe, they lament their public and private calamities, the death of friends, or the loſs of warriors; expreſs their joy on their victories; celebrate the great actions of their nation, and their heroes; excite each other to perform great exploits in war, or to ſuffer death and torments with unſhaken conſtancy.

Here then we ſee the firſt beginnings of Poetic Compoſition, in thoſe rude effuſions, which the enthuſiaſm of fancy or paſſion ſuggeſted to untaught men, when rouſed by intereſting events, and by their meeting together in public aſſemblies. Two particulars would early diſtinguiſh this language of ſong, from that in which they converſed on the common occurrences of life; namely, an unuſual arrangement of words, and the employment of bold figures of ſpeech. It would invert words, or change them from

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from that order in which they are commonly placed, to that which moſt ſuited the train in which they roſe in the Speaker's imagination: or which was moſt accommodated to the cadence of the paſſion by which he was moved. Under the influence too of any ſtrong emotion, objects do not appear to us ſuch as they really are, but ſuch as paſſion makes us ſee them. We magnify and exaggerate; we ſeek to intereſt all others in what cauſes our emotion; we compare the leaſt things to the greateſt; we call upon the abſent as well as the preſent, and even addreſs ourſelves to things inanimate. Hence, in congruity with thoſe various movements of the mind, ariſe thoſe turns of expreſſion, which we now diſtinguiſh, by the learned names of Hyperbole, Proſopopœia, Simile, &c. but which are no other than the native original language of Poetry among the moſt barbarous nations.

Man is both a Poet, and a Muſician, by nature. The ſame impulſe which prompted the enthuſiaſtic Poetic Style, prompted a certain melody, or modulation of ſound, ſuited to the emotions of Joy or Grief, of Admiration, Love, or Anger. There is a power in ſound, which, partly from nature, partly from habit and aſſociation, makes ſuch pathetic impreſſions on the fancy, as delight even the moſt wild barbarians. Muſic and Poetry, therefore, had the ſame riſe; they were prompted by the ſame occaſions; they were united in ſong; and, as long as they continued united, they tended, without doubt,

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mutually to heighten and exalt each other's power. The firſt Poets ſung their own Verſes: and hence the beginning of what we call Verſification, or Words arranged in a more artful order than Proſe, ſo as to be ſuited to ſome tune or melody. The liberty of tranſpoſition, or inverſion, which the Poetic Style, as I obſerved, would naturally aſſume, made it eaſier to form the words into ſome ſort of numbers that fell in with the Muſic of the Song. Very harſh and uncouth, we may eaſily believe, theſe numbers would be at firſt. But the pleaſure was felt; it was ſtudied; and Verſification, by degrees, paſſed into an Art.

It appears from what has been ſaid, that the firſt Compoſitions which were either recorded by Writing or tranſmitted by Tradition, could be no other than Poetical Compoſitions. No other but theſe, could draw the attention of men in their rude uncivilized ſtate. Indeed they knew no other. Cool reaſoning and plain diſcourſe had no power to attract ſavage Tribes, addicted only to hunting and war. There was nothing that could either rouſe the Speaker to pour himſelf forth, or draw the crowd to liſten, but the high powers of Paſſion, of Muſic, and of Song. This vehicle, therefore, and no other, could be employed by Chiefs and Legiſlators, when they meant to inſtruct or to animate their tribes. There is, likewiſe, a farther reaſon why ſuch Compoſitions only could be tranſmitted to poſterity; becauſe, before Writing was invented,

Songs only could laſt, and be remembered. The ear gave aſſiſtance to the memory, by the help of Numbers; fathers repeated and ſung them to their children; and by this oral tradition of national Ballads, were conveyed all the hiſtorical knowledge, and all the inſtruction, of the firſt ages. LECT. XXXVIII.

THE earlieſt accounts which Hiſtory gives us concerning all nations, bear teſtimony to theſe facts. In the firſt ages of Greece, Prieſts, Philoſophers, and Stateſmen, all delivered their inſtructions in Poetry. Apollo, Orpheus, and Amphion, their moſt antient Bards, are repreſented as the firſt tamers of mankind, the firſt founders of law and civiliſation. Minos and Thales ſung to the Lyre the laws which they compoſed*; and till the age immediately preceding that of Herodotus, Hiſtory had appeared in no other form than that of Poetical Tales.

IN the ſame manner, among all other nations, Poets and Songs are the firſt objects that make their appearance. Among the Scythian or Gothic nations, many of their kings and leaders were Scalders, or Poets; and it is from their Runic Songs, that the moſt early Writers of their Hiſtory, ſuch as Saxo-Grammaticus, acknowledge, that they had derived their chief information. Among the Celtic Tribes, in Gaul,

* Strabo, l. 10.

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Britain, and Ireland, we know, in what admiration their Bards were held, and what great influence they poſſeſſed over the people. They were both Poets and Muſicians, as all the firſt Poets, in every country, were. They were always near the perſon of the chief or ſovereign; they recorded all his great exploits; they were employed as the ambaſſadors between contending tribes, and their perſons were held ſacred.

From this deduction it follows, that as we have reaſon to look for Poems and Songs among the Antiquities of all countries, ſo we may expect, that in the ſtrain of theſe there will be a remarkable reſemblance, during the primitive periods of every country. The occaſions of their being compoſed, are every where nearly the ſame. The praiſes of Gods and Heroes, the celebration of famed anceſtors, the recital of martial deeds, ſongs of victory, and ſongs of lamentation over the misfortunes and death of their countrymen, occur among all nations; and the ſame enthuſiaſm and fire, the ſame wild and irregular, but animated Compoſition, conciſe and glowing Style, bold and extravagant Figures of Speech, are the general diſtinguiſhing characters of all the moſt antient original Poetry. That ſtrong hyperbolical manner which we have been long accuſtomed to call the Oriental manner of Poetry (becauſe ſome of the earlieſt poetical productions came to us from

from the Eaſt,) is in truth no more Oriental than Occidental; it is characteriſtical of an age rather than of a country, and belongs, in ſome meaſure, to all nations at that period which firſt gives riſe to Muſic and to Song. Mankind never reſemble each other, ſo much as they do in the beginnings of ſociety. Its ſubſequent revolutions give birth to the principal diſtinctions of character among nations, and divert into channels widely ſeparated, that current of human genius and manners, which deſcends originally from one ſpring.

Diversity of climate and of manner of living, will, however, occaſion ſome diverſity in the ſtrain of the firſt Poetry of nations; chiefly, according as thoſe nations are of a more ferocious, or of a more gentle ſpirit; and according as they advance faſter or ſlower in the arts of civiliſation. Thus we find all the remains of the antient Gothic Poetry remarkably fierce, and breathing nothing but ſlaughter and blood; while the Peruvian and the Chineſe Songs turned, from the earlieſt times, upon milder ſubjects. The Celtic Poetry, in the days of Offian, though chiefly of the martial kind, yet had attained a conſiderable mixture of tenderneſs and refinement; in conſequence of the long cultivation of Poetry among the Celtæ, by means of a ſeries and ſucceſſion of Bards which had been eſtabliſhed for ages. So Lucan informs us:

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Vos quoque qui fortes animos, belloque peremptos
Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
Plurima ſecuri fudiſtis carmina Bardi *. [L. 44.]

Among the Grecian nations, their early Poetry appears to have ſoon received a philoſophical caſt, from what we are informed concerning the ſubjects of Orpheus, Linus, and Muſæus, who treated of Creation and of Chaos, of the Generation of the World, and of the Riſe of Things; and we know that the Greeks advanced ſooner to philoſophy, and proceeded with a quicker pace in all the arts of refinement than moſt other nations.

The Arabians and the Perſians have always been the greateſt Poets of the Eaſt, and among them, as among other nations, Poetry was the earlieſt vehicle of all their learning and inſtruction†. The antient Arabs, we are informed‡, valued themſelves much on their metrical Compoſitions, which were of two ſorts; the one they compared to looſe pearls, and the other to pearls ſtrung. In the former the ſentences or

* You too, ye Bards, whom ſacred raptures fire,
To chaunt your heroes to your country's lyre,
Who conſecrate in your immortal ſtrain,
Brave patriot ſouls in righteous battle ſlain;
Securely now the uſeful taſk renew,
And nobleſt themes in deathleſs ſongs purſue. Rowe.

† Vid. Voyages de Chardin, chap. de la Poëſie des Perſans.

‡ Vid. Preliminary Diſcourſe to Sale's Tranſlation of the Koran.

verſes

verſes were without connection, and their beauty aroſe from the elegance of the expreſſion, and the acuteneſs of the ſentiment. The moral doctrines of the Perſians were generally comprehended in ſuch independent proverbial apophthegms, formed into verſe. In this reſpect they bear a conſiderable reſemblance to the Proverbs of Solomon; a great Part of which book conſiſts of unconnected Poetry, like the looſe pearls of the Arabians. The ſame form of Compoſition appears alſo in the book of Job. The Greeks ſeem to have been the firſt who introduced a more regular ſtructure, and cloſer connection of parts, into their Poetical Writings.

During the infancy of Poetry all the different kinds of it lay confuſed, and were mingled in the ſame Compoſition, according as inclination, enthuſiaſm, or caſual incidents, directed the Poet's ſtrain. In the Progreſs of Society and Arts, they began to aſſume thoſe different regular forms, and to be diſtinguiſhed by thoſe different names under which we now know them. But in the firſt rude ſtate of Poetical Effuſions, we can eaſily diſcern the ſeeds and beginnings of all the kinds of regular Poetry. Odes and Hymns of every ſort, would naturally be among the firſt Compoſitions; according as the Bards were moved by religious feelings, by exultation, reſentment, love, or any other warm ſentiment, to pour themſelves forth in Song. Plaintive or Elegiac Poetry, would as naturally ariſe from lamentations over their deceaſed friends. The recital

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recital of the achievements of their heroes, and their anceſtors, gave birth to what we now call Epic Poetry; and as not content with ſimply reciting theſe, they would infallibly be led, at ſome of their public meetings, to repreſent them, by introducing different Bards ſpeaking in the character of their heroes, and anſwering each other, we find in this the firſt outlines of Tragedy, or Dramatic Writing.

None of theſe kinds of Poetry, however, were in the firſt ages of Society properly diſtinguiſhed or ſeparated, as they are now, from each other. Indeed, not only were the different kinds of Poetry then mixed together, but all that we now call Letters, or Compoſition of any kind, was then blended in one maſs. At firſt, Hiſtory, Eloquence, and Poetry were all the ſame. Whoever wanted to move or to perſuade, to inform or to entertain his countrymen and neighbours, whatever was the ſubject, accompanied his ſentiment and tales with the melody of Song. This was the caſe in that period of ſociety, when the character and occupations of the huſbandman and the builder, the warrior and the ſtateſman, were united in one perſon. When the progreſs of Society brought on a ſeparation of the different Arts and Profeſſions of Civil Life, it led alſo by degrees to a ſeparation of the different literary provinces from each other.

The Art of Writing was in proceſs of time invented; records of paſt tranſactions began to

be kept; men, occupied with the ſubjects of policy and uſeful arts, wiſhed now to be inſtructed and informed, as well as moved. They reaſoned and reflected upon the affairs of life; and were intereſted by what was real, not fabulous, in paſt tranſactions. The Hiſtorian, therefore, now laid aſide the buſkins of Poetry; he wrote in Proſe, and attempted to give a faithful and judicious relation of former events. The Philoſopher addreſſed himſelf chiefly to the underſtanding. The Orator ſtudied to perſuade by reaſoning, and retained more or leſs of the antient paſſionate and glowing Style, according as it was conducive to his purpoſe. Poetry became now a ſeparate art, calculated chiefly to pleaſe, and confined generally to ſuch ſubjects as related to the imagination and paſſions. Even its earlieſt companion, Muſic, was in a great meaſure divided from it. LECT. XXXVIII.

These ſeparations brought all the literary arts into a more regular form, and contributed to the exact and accurate cultivation of each. Poetry, however, in its antient original condition, was perhaps more vigorous than it is in its modern ſtate. It included then, the whole burſt of the human mind; the whole exertion of its imaginative faculties. It ſpoke then the language of paſſion, and no other; for to paſſion it owed its birth. Prompted and inſpired by objects which to him ſeemed great, by events which intereſted his country or his friends, the early Bard aroſe and ſung. He ſung indeed in wild

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wild and diſorderly ſtrains; but they were the native effuſions of his heart; they were the ardent conceptions of admiration or reſentment, of ſorrow or friendſhip, which he poured forth. It is no wonder, therefore, that in the rude and artleſs ſtrain of the firſt Poetry of all nations, we ſhould often find ſomewhat that captivates and tranſports the mind. In after-ages, when Poetry became a regular art, ſtudied for reputation and for gain, Authors began to affect what they did not feel. Compoſing coolly in their cloſets, they endeavoured to imitate paſſion, rather than to expreſs it; they tried to force their imagination into raptures, or to ſupply the defect of native warmth, by thoſe artificial ornaments which might give Compoſition a ſplendid appearance.

The ſeparation of Muſic from Poetry, produced conſequences not favourable in ſome reſpects to Poetry, and in many reſpects hurtful to Muſic*. As long as they remained united, Muſic enlivened and animated Poetry, and Poetry gave force and expreſſion to muſical ſound. The Muſic of that early period was, beyond doubt, extremely ſimple; and muſt have conſiſted chiefly of ſuch pathetic notes, as the voice could adapt to the words of the Song. Muſical inſtruments, ſuch as flutes, and pipes, and a lyre with a very few ſtrings, appear to have been

* See Dr. Brown's Diſſertation on the *Riſe, Union, and Separation of Poetry and Muſic.*

early

early invented among ſome nations; but no more was intended by theſe inſtruments, than ſimply to accompany the voice, and to heighten the melody of Song. The Poet's ſtrain was always heard; and, from many circumſtances, it appears, that among the ancient Greeks, as well as among other nations, the Bard ſung his verſes, and played upon his harp or lyre at the ſame time. In this ſtate, the art of muſic was, when it produced all thoſe great effects of which we read ſo much in antient hiſtory. And certain it is, that from ſimple Muſic only, and from Muſic accompanied with Verſe or Song, we are to look for ſtrong expreſſion and powerful influence over the human mind. When inſtrumental Muſic came to be ſtudied as a ſeparate art, diveſted of the Poet's Song, and formed into the artificial and intricate combinations of harmony, it loſt all its antient power of inflaming the hearers with ſtrong emotions; and ſunk into an art of mere amuſement, among poliſhed and luxurious nations.

STILL, however, Poetry preſerves, in all countries, ſome remains of its firſt and original connection with Muſic. By being uttered in Song, it was formed into numbers, or into an artificial arrangement of words and ſyllables, very different in different countries; but ſuch as, to the inhabitants of each, ſeemed moſt melodious and agreeable in ſound. Whence ariſes that great characteriſtic of Poetry which we now call verſe; a ſubject which comes next to be treated of.

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It is a ſubject of a curious nature; but as I am ſenſible, that, were I to purſue it as far as my inclination leads, it would give riſe to diſcuſſions, which the greater part of Readers would conſider as minute, I ſhall confine myſelf to a few obſervations upon Engliſh Verſification.

Nations, whoſe language and pronunciation were of a muſical kind, reſted their Verſification chiefly upon the quantities, that is, the length or ſhortneſs of their ſyllables. Others, who did not make the quantities of their ſyllables be ſo diſtinctly perceived in pronouncing them, reſted the melody of their Verſe upon the number of ſyllables it contained, upon the proper diſpoſition of accents and pauſes in it, and frequently upon that return of correſponding ſounds, which we call Rhyme. The former was the caſe with the Greeks and Romans; the latter is the caſe with us, and with moſt modern nations. Among the Greeks and Romans, every ſyllable, or the far greateſt number at leaſt, was known to have a fixed and determined quantity; and their manner of pronouncing rendered this ſo ſenſible to the ear, that a long ſyllable was counted preciſely equal in time to two ſhort ones. Upon this principle, the number of ſyllables contained in their hexameter verſe was allowed to vary. It may extend to 17; it can contain, when regular, no fewer than 13: but the muſical time was, notwithſtanding, preciſely the ſame in every hexameter verſe, and was always equal to that of 12 long ſyllables. In order to aſcertain the regular

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regular time of every verſe, and the proper mixture and ſucceſſion of long and ſhort ſyllables which ought to compoſe it, were invented, what the Grammarians call Metrical Feet, Dactyles, Spondees, Iambus, &c. By theſe meaſures was tried the accuracy of Compoſition in every line, and whether it was ſo conſtructed as to complete its proper melody. It was requiſite, for inſtance, that the hexameter verſe ſhould have the quantity of its ſyllables ſo diſpoſed, that it could be ſcanned or meaſured by ſix metrical feet, which might be either Dactyles or Spondees (as the muſical time of both theſe is the ſame), with this reſtriction only, that the fifth foot was regularly to be a Dactyle, and the laſt a Spondee*.

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* Some writers imagine, that the feet in Latin Verſe were intended to correſpond to bars in Muſic, and to form muſical intervals or diſtinctions, ſenſible to the ear in the pronunciation of the line. Had this been the caſe, every kind of Verſe muſt have had a peculiar order of feet appropriated to it. But the common proſodies ſhow, that there are ſeveral forms of Latin Verſe which are capable of being meaſured indifferently, by a ſeries of feet of very different kinds. For inſtance, what is called the Aſclepedæan Verſe (in which the firſt ode of Horace is written) may be ſcanned either by a Spondeus, two Choriambus's and a Pyrrichius; or by a Spondeus, a Dactylus ſucceeded by Cæſura and two Dactylus's. The common Pentameter, and ſome other forms of Verſe, admit the like varieties; and yet the melody of the Verſe remains always the ſame, though it be ſcanned by different feet. This proves, that the metrical feet were not ſenſible in the pronunciation of the line, but were intended only to regulate its conſtruction; or applied as meaſures, to try whether the ſucceſſion of long and ſhort ſyllables was ſuch as

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THE introduction of theſe feet into Engliſh Verſe, would be altogether out of place; for the genius of our language correſponds not in this reſpect to the Greek or Latin. I ſay not, that we have no regard to quantity, or to long and ſhort, in pronouncing. Many words we have, eſpecially our words conſiſting of ſeveral ſyllables, where the quantity, or the long and ſhort ſyllables, are invariably fixed; but great numbers we have alſo, where the quantity is left altogether looſe. This is the caſe with a great part of our words conſiſting of two ſyllables, and with almoſt all our monoſyllables. In general, the difference made between long and ſhort ſyllables, in our manner of pronouncing them, is ſo very inconſiderable, and ſo much liberty is left us for making them either long or ſhort at pleaſure, that mere quantity is of very little effect in Engliſh Verſification. The only perceptible difference among our ſyllables, ariſes from ſome of them being uttered with that ſtronger percuſſion of voice, which we call Accent. This Accent does not always make the ſyllable longer, but gives

as ſuited the melody of the Verſe: and as feet of different kinds could ſometimes be applied for this purpoſe, hence it happened, that ſome forms of Verſe were capable of being ſcanned in different ways. For meaſuring the hexameter line, no other feet were found ſo proper as Dactyles and Spondees, and therefore by theſe it is uniformly ſcanned. But no ear is ſenſible of the termination of each foot, in reading an hexameter line. From a miſapprehenſion of this matter, I apprehend that confuſion has ſometimes ariſen among Writers in treating of the proſody both of Latin and of Engliſh Verſe.

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it more force of ſound only; and it is upon a certain order and ſucceſſion of accented and unaccented ſyllables, infinitely more than upon their being long or ſhort, that the melody of our Verſe depends. If we take any of Mr. Pope's lines, and in reciting them alter the quantity of the ſyllables, as far as our quantities are ſenſible, the Muſic of the Verſe will not be much injured: whereas, if we do not accent the ſyllables according as the Verſe dictates, its melody will be totally deſtroyed*.

Our Engliſh Heroic Verſe is of what may be called an Iambic ſtructure; that is, compoſed of a ſucceſſion nearly alternate of ſyllables, not ſhort and long, but unaccented and accented. With regard to the place of theſe accents, however, ſome liberty is admitted, for the ſake of variety. Very often, though not always, the line begins with an unaccented ſyllable; and ſometimes, in the courſe of it, two unaccented ſyllables follow each other. But in general, there are either five,

* See this well illuſtrated in Lord Monboddo's Treatiſe of *the Origin and Progreſs of Language*, Vol. II. under the head of the Proſody of Language. He ſhews that this is not only the conſtitution of our own Verſe, but that by our manner of reading Latin Verſe, we make its Muſic nearly the ſame. For we certainly do not pronounce it according to the antient quantities, ſo as to make the muſical time of one long ſyllable equal to two ſhort ones; but according to a ſucceſſion of accented and unaccented ſyllables, only mixed in a ratio different from that of our own Verſe. No Roman could poſſibly underſtand our pronunciation.

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or four, accented ſyllables in each line. The number of ſyllables is ten, unleſs where an Alexandrian Verſe is occaſionally admitted. In Verſes not Alexandrian, inſtances occur where the line appears to have more than the limited number. But in ſuch inſtances I apprehend it will be found, that ſome of the liquid ſyllables are ſo ſlurred in pronouncing, as to bring the Verſe, with reſpect to its effect upon the ear, within the uſual bounds.

Another eſſential circumſtance in the conſtitution of our Verſe, is the cæſural pauſe, which falls towards the middle of each line. Some pauſe of this kind, dictated by the melody, is found in the Verſe of moſt nations. It is found, as might be ſhewn, in the Latin hexameter. In the French Heroic Verſe, it is very ſenſible. That is a Verſe of twelve ſyllables, and in every line, juſt after the ſixth ſyllable, there falls regularly and indiſpenſably, a cæſural pauſe, dividing the line into two equal hemiſtichs. For example, in the firſt lines of Boileau's Epiſtle to the King.

Jeune & vaillant heros | dont la haute ſageſſe
N'eſt point le fruit tardif | d'une lente vieilleſſe,
Qui ſeul ſans Miniſtre | à l'example des Dieux
Soutiens tout par toi-meme | & vois tous par ſes veux.

In this train all their Verſes proceed; the one half of the line always anſwering to the other, and the ſame chime returning inceſſantly on the ear

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ear without intermiſſion or change; which is certainly a defect in their Verſe, and unfits it ſo very much for the freedom and dignity of Heroic Poetry. On the other hand it is a diſtinguiſhing advantage of our Engliſh Verſe, that it allows the pauſe to be varied through four different ſyllables in the line. The pauſe may fall after the 4th, the 5th, the 6th, or the 7th ſyllable; and according as the pauſe is placed after one or other of theſe ſyllables, the melody of the verſe is much changed, its air and cadence are diverſified. By this means, uncommon richneſs and variety are added to Engliſh Verſification.

When the pauſe falls earlieſt, that is, after the 4th ſyllable, the briſkeſt melody is thereby formed, and the moſt ſpirited air given to the line. In the following lines of the Rape of the Lock, Mr. Pope has with exquiſite propriety ſuited the conſtruction of the Verſe to the ſubject:

On her white breaſt | a ſparkling croſs ſhe wore,
Which Jews might kiſs | and infidels adore;
Her lively looks | a ſprightly mind diſcloſe,
Quick as her eyes | and as unfixed as thoſe,
Favours to none | to all ſhe ſmiles extends,
Oft ſhe rejects | but never once offends.

When the pauſe falls after the 5th ſyllable, which divides the line into two equal portions, the melody is ſenſibly altered. The Verſe loſes that briſk and ſprightly air, which it had with

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the former pauſe, and becomes more ſmooth, gentle, and flowing.

Eternal ſunſhine | of the ſpotleſs mind,
Each prayer accepted | and each wiſh reſigned.

When the pauſe proceeds to follow the 6th ſyllable, the tenor of the Muſic becomes ſolemn and grave. The Verſe marches now with a more ſlow and meaſured pace, than in either of the two former caſes.

The wrath of Peleus' ſon | the direful ſpring
Of all the Grecian woes | O goddeſs, ſing!

But the grave ſolemn cadence becomes ſtill more ſenſible, when the pauſe falls after the 7th ſyllable, which is the neareſt place to the end of the line that it can occupy. This kind of Verſe occurs the ſeldomeſt, but has a happy effect in diverſifying the melody. It produces that ſlow Alexandrian air, which is finely ſuited to a cloſe; and for this reaſon, ſuch lines almoſt never occur together, but are uſed in finiſhing the couplet.

And in the ſmooth deſcription | murmur ſtill.
Long loved adored ideas! | all adieu.

I have taken my examples from Verſes in rhyme; becauſe in theſe, our Verſification is ſubjected to the ſtricteſt law. As Blank Verſe is of a freer kind, and naturally is read with leſs cadence or tone, the pauſes in it, and the effect

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effect of them, are not always ſo ſenſible to the ear. It is conſtructed, however, entirely upon the ſame principles, with reſpect to the place of the pauſe. There are ſome, who, in order to exalt the variety and the power of our Heroic Verſe, have maintained that it admits of muſical pauſes, not only after thoſe four ſyllables where I aſſigned their place, but after any one ſyllable in the Verſe indifferently, where the ſenſe directs it to be placed. This, in my opinion, is the ſame thing as to maintain that there is no pauſe at all belonging to the natural melody of the Verſe; ſince, according to this notion, the pauſe is formed entirely to the meaning, not by the muſic. But this I apprehend to be contrary both to the nature of Verſification, and to the experience of every good ear*. Thoſe certainly are the happieſt lines, wherein the pauſe prompted by the melody, coincides in ſome

* In the Italian Heroic Verſe employed by Taſſo in his Gierusalemme, and Arioſto in his Orlando, the pauſes are of the ſame varied nature with thoſe which I have ſhewn to belong to Engliſh Verſification, and fall after the ſame four ſyllables in the line. Marmontel, in his Poëtique Françoiſe, Vol. I. p. 269. takes notice that this conſtruction of Verſe is common to the Italians and the Engliſh; and defends the uniformity of the French cæſural pauſe upon this ground, that the alternation of maſculine and feminine rhymes, furniſhes ſufficient variety to the French Poetry; whereas the change of movement occaſioned by the four different pauſes in Engliſh and Italian Verſe, produces, according to him, too great diverſity. On the head of pauſes in Engliſh Verſification, ſee the Elements of Criticiſm, Chap. 18. Sect. 4.

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degree with that of the ſenſe, or at leaſt does not tend to ſpoil or interrupt the meaning. Wherever any oppoſition between the muſic and the ſenſe chances to take place, I obſerved before, in treating of Pronunciation or Delivery, that the proper method of reading theſe lines, is to read them according as the ſenſe dictates, neglecting or ſlurring the cæſural pauſe, which renders the line leſs graceful indeed, but, however, does not entirely deſtroy its ſound.

Our Blank Verſe poſſeſſes great advantages, and is indeed a noble, bold, and diſencumbered ſpecies of Verſification. The principal defect in rhyme, is the full cloſe which it forces upon the ear, at the end of every couplet. Blank Verſe is freed from this, and allows the lines to run into each other with as great liberty as the Latin hexameter permits, perhaps with greater. Hence it is particularly ſuited to ſubjects of dignity and force, which demand more free and manly numbers than rhyme. The conſtraint and ſtrict regularity of rhyme, are unfavourable to the ſublime, or to the highly pathetic ſtrain. An Epic Poem, or a Tragedy, would be fettered and degraded by it. It is beſt adapted to compoſitions of a temperate ſtrain, where no particular vehemence is required in the Sentiments, nor great ſublimity in the Style; ſuch as Paſtorals, Elegies, Epiſtles, Satires, &c. To theſe it communicates that degree of elevation which is proper for them; and without any other aſſiſtance

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ſufficiently diſtinguiſhes the Style from Proſe. He who ſhould write ſuch Poems in Blank Verſe, would render his work harſh and unpleaſing. In order to ſupport a poetical Style, he would be obliged to affect a pomp of language, unſuitable to the ſubject.

THOUGH I join in opinion with thoſe, who think that rhyme finds its proper place in the middle, but not in the higher regions of Poetry, I can by no means join in the invectives which ſome have poured out againſt it, as if it were a mere barbarous jingling of ſounds, fit only for children, and owing to nothing but the corruption of taſte in the monkiſh ages. Rhyme might indeed be barbarous in Latin or Greek Verſe, becauſe theſe languages by the ſonorouſneſs of their words, by their liberty of tranſpoſition and inverſion, by their fixed quantities and muſical pronunciation, could carry on the melody of verſe without its aid. But it does not follow, that therefore it muſt be barbarous in the Engliſh language, which is deſtitute of theſe advantages. Every language has powers and graces, and muſic peculiar to itſelf; and what is becoming in one, would be ridiculous in another. Rhyme was barbarous in Latin; and an attempt to conſtruct Engliſh Verſes after the form of hexameters, and pentameters, and Sapphics, is as barbarous among us. It is not true, that rhyme is merely a monkiſh invention. On the contrary, it has obtained under different forms, in the Verſification of moſt known nations. It is found

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in the antient poetry of the northern nations of Europe; it is ſaid to be found among the Arabs, the Perſians, the Indians, and the Americans. This ſhews that there is ſomething in the return of ſimilar ſounds, which is grateful to the ears of moſt part of mankind. And if any one, after reading Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock, or Eloiſa to Abelard, ſhall not admit our rhyme, with all its varieties of pauſes, to carry both elegance, and ſweetneſs of ſound, his ear muſt be pronounced to be of a very peculiar kind.

The preſent form of our Engliſh Heroic rhyme in couplets, is a modern ſpecies of Verſification. The meaſure generally uſed in the days of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and King Charles I. was the ſtanza of eight lines, ſuch as Spenſer employs, borrowed from the Italian; a meaſure very conſtrained and artificial. Waller was the firſt who brought couplets into vogue; and Dryden afterwards eſtabliſhed the uſage. Waller firſt ſmoothed our Verſe; Dryden perfected it. Mr. Pope's Verſification has a peculiar character. It is flowing and ſmooth in the higheſt degree; far more laboured and correct than that of any who went before him. He introduced one conſiderable change into Heroic Verſe, by totally throwing aſide the triplets, or three lines rhyming together, in which Mr. Dryden abounded. Dryden's Verſification, however, has very great merit; and, like all his productions, has much ſpirit, mixed with careleſſneſs. If not ſo ſmooth

and correct as Pope's, it is however more varied and easy. He subjects himself less to the rule of closing the sense with the couplet; and frequently takes the liberty of making his couplets run into one another, with somewhat of the freedom of Blank Verse. LECT. XXXVIII.

LECTURE XXXIX.

PASTORAL POETRY—LYRIC POETRY.

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In the laſt Lecture, I gave an account of the Riſe and Progreſs of Poetry, and made ſome obſervations on the nature of Engliſh Verſification. I now proceed to treat of the chief kinds of Poetical Compoſition, and of the critical rules that relate to them. I ſhall follow that order which is moſt ſimple and natural, beginning with the leſſer forms of Poetry, and aſcending from them to the Epic and Dramatic, as the moſt dignified. This Lecture ſhall be employed on Paſtoral and Lyric Poetry.

Though I begin with the conſideration of Paſtoral Poetry, it is not becauſe I conſider it as one of the earlieſt forms of Poetical Compoſition. On the contrary, I am of opinion that it was not cultivated as a diſtinct ſpecies, or ſubject of Writing, until ſociety had advanced in refinement. Moſt Authors have indeed indulged the fancy, that becauſe the life which mankind

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mankind at firſt led was rural, therefore their firſt Poetry was Paſtoral, or employed in the celebration of rural ſcenes and objects. I make no doubt, that it would borrow many of its images and alluſions from thoſe natural objects with which men were beſt acquainted; but I am perſuaded that the calm and tranquil ſcenes of rural felicity were not, by any means, the firſt objects which inſpired that ſtrain of Compoſition which we now call Poetry. It was inſpired, in the firſt periods of every nation, by events and objects which rouſed men's paſſions; or, at leaſt, awakened their wonder and admiration. The actions of their Gods and Heroes, their own exploits in war, the ſucceſſes or misfortunes of their countrymen and friends, furniſhed the firſt Themes to the Bards of every country. What was of a Paſtoral kind in their Compoſitions, was incidental only. They did not think of chuſing for their Theme the tranquillity and the pleaſures of the country, as long as theſe were daily and familiar objects to them. It was not till men had begun to be aſſembled in great cities, after the diſtinctions of rank and ſtation were formed, and the buſtle of Courts and large Societies was known, that Paſtoral Poetry aſſumed its preſent form. Men then began to look back upon the more ſimple and innocent life which their forefathers led, or which, at leaſt, they fancied them to have led: they looked back upon it with pleaſure; and in thoſe rural ſcenes, and paſtoral occupations, imagining a degree of felicity to take place ſuperior to what they

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they now enjoyed, conceived the idea of celebrating it in Poetry. It was in the court of King Ptolemy that Theocritus wrote the firſt Paſtorals with which we are acquainted; and in the court of Auguſtus he was imitated by Virgil.

But whatever may have been the origin of Paſtoral Poetry, it is, undoubtedly, a natural and very agreeable form of Poetical Compoſition. It recals to our imagination thoſe gay ſcenes, and pleaſing views of nature, which commonly are the delight of our childhood and youth; and to which, in more advanced years, the greateſt part of men recur with pleaſure. It exhibits to us a life with which we are accuſtomed to aſſociate the ideas of peace, of leiſure, and of innocence; and therefore we readily ſet open our heart to ſuch repreſentations as promiſe to baniſh from our thoughts the cares of the world, and to tranſport us into calm Elyſian regions. At the ſame time, no ſubject ſeems to be more favourable to Poetry. Amidſt rural objects, nature preſents, on all hands, the fineſt field for deſcription; and nothing appears to flow more, of its own accord, into Poetical Numbers, than rivers and mountains, meadows and hills, flocks and trees, and ſhepherds void of care. Hence this ſpecies of Poetry has, at all times, allured many Readers, and excited many Writers. But, notwithſtanding the advantages it poſſeſſes, it will appear, from what I have farther to obſerve upon it, that there is hardly any ſpecies of Poetry which is more difficult

ficult to be carried to perfection, or in which fewer Writers have excelled. LECT. XXXIX.

PASTORAL life may be conſidered in three different views; either ſuch as it now actually is; when the ſtate of ſhepherds is reduced to be a mean, ſervile, and laborious ſtate; when their employments are become diſagreeable, and their ideas groſs and low: or ſuch as we may ſuppoſe it once to have been, in the more early and ſimple ages, when it was a life of eaſe and abundance; when the wealth of men conſiſted chiefly in flocks and herds, and the ſhepherd, though unrefined in his manners, was reſpectable in his ſtate: or, laſtly, ſuch as it never was, and never can in reality be, when, to the eaſe, innocence, and ſimplicity of the early ages, we attempt to add the poliſhed taſte and cultivated manners of modern times: Of theſe three ſtates, the firſt is too groſs and mean, the laſt too refined and unnatural, to be made the ground-work of Paſtoral Poetry. Either of theſe extremes is a rock upon which the Poet will ſplit, if he approach too near it. We ſhall be diſguſted if he give us too much of the ſervile employments and low ideas of actual peaſants, as Theocritus is cenſured for having ſometimes done; and if, like ſome of the French and Italian Writers of Paſtorals, he makes his Shepherds diſcourſe as if they were courtiers and ſcholars, he then retains the name only, but wants the ſpirit of Paſtoral Poetry.

HE

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He muſt, therefore, keep in the middle ſtation between theſe. He muſt form to himſelf the idea of a rural ſtate, ſuch as in certain periods of Society may have actually taken place, where there was eaſe, equality, and innocence; where Shepherds were gay and agreeable, without being learned or refined; and plain and artleſs, without being groſs and wretched. The great charm of Paſtoral Poetry ariſes from the view which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happineſs of a rural life. This pleaſing illuſion, therefore, the Poet muſt carefully maintain. He muſt diſplay to us all that is agreeable in that ſtate, but hide whatever is diſpleaſing*. Let him

* In the following beautiful lines of the firſt Eclogue, Virgil has, in the true ſpirit of a Paſtoral Poet, brought together as agreeable an aſſemblage of images of rural pleaſure as can any where be found:

Fortunate ſenex! hic inter flumina nota,
Et fontes ſacros frigus captabis opacum.
Hinc tibi, quæ ſemper vicino ab limite ſepes,
Hyblæis apibus, florem depaſta ſalicti,
Sæpe levi ſomnum ſuadebit inire ſuſurro,
Hinc altâ ſub rupe canet frondator ad auras;
Nec tamen interea, raucæ, tua cura, palumbes,
Nec gemere aëriâ ceſſabit turtur ab ulmo.

Happy old man! here mid th' accuſtom'd ſtreams
And ſacred ſprings you'll ſhun the ſcorching beams;
While from yon willow fence, thy paſture's bound,
The bees that ſuck their flowery ſtores around,
Shall ſweetly mingle with the whiſpering boughs,
Their lulling murmurs, and invite repoſe.

While

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him paint its ſimplicity and innocence to the full, but cover its rudeneſs and miſery. Diſtreſſes, indeed, and anxieties, he may attribute to it; for it would be perfectly unnatural to ſuppoſe any condition of human life to be without them; but they muſt be of ſuch a nature as not to ſhock the fancy with any thing peculiarly diſguſting in the Paſtoral life. The Shepherd may well be afflicted for the diſpleaſure of his miſtreſs, or for the loſs of a favourite lamb. It is a ſufficient recommendation of any ſtate, to have only ſuch evils as theſe to deplore. In ſhort, it is the Paſtoral life ſomewhat embelliſhed and beautified, at leaſt ſeen on its faireſt ſide only, that the Poet ought to preſent to us. But let him take care that, in embelliſhing nature, he do not altogether diſguiſe her; or pretend to join with rural ſimplicity and happineſs, ſuch improvements as are unnatural and foreign to it. If it be not exactly real life which he preſents to us, it muſt, however, be ſomewhat that reſembles it. This, in my opinion, is the general idea of Paſtoral Poetry. But, in order to examine it more particularly, let us conſider, firſt, the ſcenery; next, the characters; and laſtly, the ſubjects and actions which this ſort of Compoſition ſhould exhibit.

While from ſteep rocks the pruner's ſong is heard;
Nor the ſoft cooing dove, thy fav'rite bird,
Meanwhile ſhall ceaſe to breathe her melting ſtrain,
Nor turtles from th' aërial elms to plain. WHARTON.

As

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As to the Scene, it is clear, that it muſt always be laid in the country, and much of the Poet's merit depends on deſcribing it beautifully. Virgil is, in this reſpect, excelled by Theocritus, whoſe deſcriptions of natural beauties are richer, and more pictureſque than thoſe of the other *. In every Paſtoral, a ſcene, or rural proſpect, ſhould be diſtinctly drawn, and ſet

* What rural ſcenery, for inſtance, can be painted in more lively colours than the following deſcription exhibits?

——— ἔν τε βαθείαις
Ἁβείας σχίνοιο χαμευνεσιν ἐκλειθιναμες
Ἔν τε νεοτμάτοισι γεγαθότες ὀναρέοισι.
Πολλαὶ δ' ἄμμιν ὕπερθε κατα κρατὸς δονεόντο·
Λιγειροὶ πτελέαι τε· το δ' ἐγγίθεν ἱερὸν ὄδωρ
Νυμφᾶν ἐξ ἄντροιο κατειβόμενον κελαρυσδεν.
Τοὶ δὲ ποτι σκιεραῖς ορεδαμνίσιν ἀυθαλίωνες
Τεττίγες λαλαγεῦντες ἔχον πόνον. ἁ δ' ὀλολυγὼν
Τηλόθεν ἐν πυκιναῖσι βάτων τρύζεσκεν ἀκάνθαις.
Ἄειδον κόρυδοι και ἀκανθίδες ἔστενε τρύγων·
Πωτωντο ξυθαὶ περι πίδακας αμφι μέλισσαι
Παὐτ' ὤσδεν θέρεος μαλα πίονος· ὤσδε δ' ὠπώρης·
Ὄχναι μὲν παρ ποσσὶ παρα πλευραισι δε μαλα
Λαψιλέως ἄμμιν ἐκυλίνδετο· τοι δ' εκεχυντο
Ὄρπακες βρα βύλοισι καταβρίθοντες ἔρασδε·

Theocrit. Idyll. vii. 132.

——on ſoft beds recline
Of lentiſk, and young branches of the vine:
Poplars and elms above, their foliage ſpread,
Lent a cool ſhade, and wav'd the breezy head;
Below, a ſtream, from the nymphs ſacred cave,
In free meanders led its murm'ring wave:
In the warm ſun-beams, verdant ſhades among,
Shrill graſshoppers renew'd their plaintive ſong;

At

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ſet before us. It is not enough, that we have thoſe unmeaning groupes of violets and roſes, of birds, and brooks, and breezes, which our common Paſtoral-mongers throw together, and which are perpetually recurring upon us without variation. A good Poet ought to give us ſuch a landſcape, as a painter could copy after. His object muſt be particulariſed: the ſtream, the rock, or the tree, muſt, each of them, ſtand forth, ſo as to make a figure in the imagination, and to give us a pleaſing conception of the place where we are. A ſingle object, happily introduced, will ſometimes diſtinguiſh and characteriſe a whole ſcene; ſuch as the antique ruſtic Sepulchre, a very beautiful object in a landſcape; which Virgil has ſet before us, and which he has taken from Theocritus:

Hinc adeo media eſt nobis via; jamque ſepulchrum
Incipit apparere Bianoris; hic ubi denſas
Agricolæ ſtringunt frondes—— Ecl. IX.*

At diſtance far, concealed in ſhades, alone,
Sweet Philomela pour'd her tuneful moan:
The lark, the goldfinch, warbled lays of love,
And ſweetly penſive, coo'd the turtle dove:
While honey bees, for ever on the wing,
Humm'd round the flowers, or ſipt the ſilver ſpring,
The rich, ripe ſeaſon, gratified the ſenſe
With ſummer's ſweets, and autumn's redolence.
Apples and pears lay ſtrew'd in heaps around,
And the plum's loaded branches kiſs'd the ground.

Fawkes.

* ——To our mid journey are we come,
I ſee the top of old Bianor's tomb;

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Not only in profeſſed deſcriptions of the ſcenery, but in the frequent alluſions to natural objects, which occur, of courſe, in Paſtorals, the Poet muſt, above all things, ſtudy variety. He muſt diverſify his face of nature, by preſenting to us new images; or otherwiſe, he will ſoon become inſipid with thoſe known topics of deſcription, which were original, it is true, in the firſt Poets, who copied them from nature, but which are now worn threadbare by inceſſant imitation. It is alſo incumbent on him to ſuit the ſcenery to the ſubject of the Paſtoral; and, according as it is of a gay or a melancholy kind, to exhibit nature under ſuch forms as may correſpond with the emotions or ſentiments which he deſcribes. Thus Virgil, in his ſecond Eclogue, which contains the Lamentation of a deſpairing Lover, gives, with propriety, a gloomy appearance to the ſcene:

Tantum inter denſas, umbroſa cacumina, fagos,
Aſſiduè veniebat; ibi hæc incondita ſolus
Montibus & ſylvis ſtudio jactabat inani *.

With regard to the characters, or perſons, which are proper to be introduced into Paſtorals, it is not enough that they be perſons reſiding in

Here Mæris, where the ſwains thick branches prune,
And ſtrew their leaves, our voices let us tune.
WARTON.

* Mid ſhapes of thickeſt beech he pin'd alone,
To the wild woods and mountains made his moan;
Still day by day, in incoherent ſtrains,
'Twas all he could, deſpairing told his pains. WARTON.

the

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the country. The adventures, or the diſcourſes of courtiers or citizens, in the country, are not what we look for in ſuch Writings; we expect to be entertained by Shepherds, or perſons wholly engaged in rural occupations; whoſe innocence and freedom from the cares of the world may, in our imagination, form an agreeable contraſt with the manners and characters of thoſe who are engaged in the buſtle of life.

One of the principal difficulties which here occurs has been already hinted; that of keeping the exact medium between too much ruſticity on the one hand, and two much refinement on the other. The Shepherd, aſſuredly, muſt be plain and unaffected in his manner of thinking, on all ſubjects. An amiable ſimplicity muſt be the ground-work of his character. At the ſame time, there is no neceſſity for his being dull and inſipid. He may have good ſenſe and reflection; he may have ſprightlineſs and vivacity; he may have very tender and delicate feelings; ſince theſe are, more or leſs, the portion of men in all ranks of life; and ſince, undoubtedly, there was much genius in the world, before there were learning, or arts, to refine it. But then he muſt not ſubtiliſe; he muſt not deal in general reflections, and abſtract reaſoning; and ſtill leſs in the points and conceits of an affected gallantry, which ſurely belong not to his character and ſituation. Some of theſe conceits are the chief blemiſhes of the Italian Paſtorals, which are otherwiſe beautiful. When Aminta, in

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Taſſo, is diſentangling his Miſtreſs's hair from the tree to which a ſavage had bound it, he is repreſented as ſaying: "Cruel tree! how "couldſt thou injure that lovely hair which did "thee ſo much honour? thy rugged trunk was "not worthy of ſuch lovely knots. What ad- "vantage have the ſervants of love, if thoſe "precious chains are common to them, and to "the trees*?" Such ſtrained ſentiments as theſe, ill befit the woods. Rural perſonages are ſuppoſed to ſpeak the language of plain ſenſe, and natural feelings. When they deſcribe, or relate, they do it with ſimplicity, and naturally allude to rural circumſtances; as in thoſe beautiful lines of one of Virgil's Eclogues:

Sepibus in noſtris parvam te roſcida mala
(Dux ego veſter eram) vidi cum matre legentem;
Alter ab undecimo tum me jam ceperat annus,
Jam fragiles poteram a terra contingere ramos.
Ut vidi, ut perii, ut me malus abſtulit error †.

* Gia di nodi ſi bei non era degno
Coſi rovido tronco; or che vantaggio
Ilanno i ſervi d'amor, ſe lor commune
E'con le piante ill pretioſo laccio?
Pianta crudel! poteſti quel bel crine
Offender, tu, ch'a te ſeo tanto onore? ATTO III. Sc. I.

† Once with your mother to our fields you came
For dewy apples; thence I date my flame;
The choiceſt fruit I pointed to your view,
Though young, my raptured ſoul was fix'd on you;
The boughs I juſt could reach with little arms;
But then, even then, could feel thy powerful charms.
O, how I gaz'd, in pleaſing tranſport toſt!
How glow'd my heart in ſweet deluſion loſt! WARTON.

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In another paſſage, he makes a Shepherdeſs throw an apple at her lover:

Tum fugit ad ſalices, et ſe cupit ante videri *.

This is *naïve*, as the French expreſs it, and perfectly ſuited to Paſtoral manners. Mr. Pope wanted to imitate this paſſage, and, as he thought, to improve upon it. He does it thus:

The ſprightly Sylvia trips along the green,
She runs; but hopes ſhe does not run unſeen;
While a kind glance at her purſuer flies,
How much at variance are her feet and eyes!

This falls far ſhort of Virgil; the natural and pleaſing ſimplicity of the deſcription is deſtroyed, by the quaint and affected turn in the laſt line: "How much at variance are her feet and eyes."

Supposing the Poet to have formed correct ideas concerning his Paſtoral characters and perſonages; the next enquiry is, About what is he to employ them? and what are to be the ſubjects of his Eclogues? For it is not enough, that he gives us Shepherds diſcourſing together. Every good Poem, of every kind, ought to have a ſubject which ſhould, in ſome way, intereſt us. Now, here, I apprehend, lies the chief difficulty of Paſtoral Writing. The active ſcenes of country life either are, or to moſt deſcribers

* My Phyllis me with pelted apples plies;
Then, tripping to the wood, the wanton lies,
And wiſhes to be ſeen before ſhe flies. Dryden.

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appear to be, too barren of incidents. The ſtate of a ſhepherd, or a perſon occupied in rural employments only, is expoſed to few of thoſe accidents and revolutions which render his ſituation intereſting, or produce curioſity or ſurpriſe. The tenor of his life is uniform. His ambition is conceived to be without policy, and his love without intrigue. Hence it is, that, of all Poems, the moſt meagre commonly in the ſubject, and the leaſt diverſified in the ſtrain, is the Paſtoral. From the firſt lines, we can, generally, gueſs at all that is to follow. It is either a Shepherd who ſits down ſolitary by a brook, to lament the abſence or cruelty of his miſtreſs, and to tell us how the trees wither, and the flowers droop, now that ſhe is gone; or we have two Shepherds who challenge one another to ſing, rehearſing alternate verſes, which have little either of meaning or ſubject, till the Judge rewards one with a ſtudded crook, and another with a beechen bowl. To the frequent repetition of common-place topics, of this ſort, which have been thrummed over by all Eclogue Writers ſince the days of Theocritus and Virgil, is owing much of that inſipidity which prevails in Paſtoral Compoſitions.

I MUCH queſtion, however, whether this inſipidity be not owing to the fault of the Poets, and to their barren and ſlaviſh imitation of the antient paſtoral topics, rather than to the confined nature of the ſubject. For why may not Paſtoral Poetry take a wider range? Human nature

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nature and human paſſions are much the ſame in every rank of life; and wherever theſe paſſions operate on objects that are within the rural ſphere, there may be a proper ſubject for Paſtoral. One would indeed chooſe to remove from this ſort of Compoſition the operations of violent and direful paſſions, and to preſent ſuch only as are conſiſtent with innocence, ſimplicity, and virtue. But under this limitation, there will ſtill be abundant ſcope for a careful obſerver of nature to exert his genius. The various adventures which give occaſion to thoſe engaged in country life to diſplay their diſpoſition and temper; the ſcenes of domeſtic felicity or diſquiet; the attachment of friends and of brothers; the rivalſhip and competitions of lovers; the unexpected ſucceſſes or misfortunes of families, might give occaſion to many a pleaſing and tender incident; and were more of the narrative and ſentimental intermixed with the deſcriptive in this kind of Poetry, it would become much more intereſting than it now generally is, to the bulk of readers *.

The two great fathers of Paſtoral Poetry are, Theocritus and Virgil. Theocritus was a Sicilian; and as he has laid the ſcene of his Eclogues in

* The above obſervations on the barrenneſs of the common Eclogues were written before any tranſlation from the German had made us acquainted in this country with Geſner's Idylls, in which the ideas that had occurred to me for the improvement of Paſtoral Poetry, are fully realized.

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his own country, Sicily became ever afterwards a ſort of conſecrated ground for Paſtoral Poetry. His Idyllia, as he has entitled them, are not all of equal merit; nor indeed are they all Paſtorals; but ſome of them, poems of a quite different nature. In ſuch, however, as are properly Paſtorals, there are many and great beauties. He is diſtinguiſhed for the ſimplicity of his ſentiments; for the great ſweetneſs and harmony of his numbers, and for the richneſs of his ſcenery and deſcription. He is the original, of which Virgil is the imitator. For moſt of Virgil's higheſt beauties in his Eclogues are copied from Theocritus; in many places he has done nothing more than tranſlate him. He muſt be allowed, however, to have imitated him with great judgment, and in ſome reſpects to have improved upon him. For Theocritus, it cannot be denied, deſcends ſometimes into ideas that are groſs and mean, and makes his ſhepherds abuſive and immodeſt; whereas Virgil is free from offenſive ruſticity, and at the ſame time preſerves the character of paſtoral ſimplicity. The ſame diſtinction obtains between Theocritus and Virgil, as between many other of the Greek and Roman writers. The Greek led the way, followed nature more cloſely, and ſhewed more original genius. The Roman diſcovered more of the poliſh and correctneſs of art. We have a few remains of other two Greek Poets in the Paſtoral Style, Moſchus and Bion, which have very conſiderable merit; and if they want the ſimplicity of

of Theocritus, excel him in tenderneſs and delicacy. LECT. XXXIX.

The modern writers of Paſtorals have, generally, contented themſelves with copying, or imitating, the deſcriptions and ſentiments of the antient Poets. Sannazarius, indeed, a famous Latin Poet, in the age of Leo X. attempted a bold innovation. He compoſed Piſcatory Eclogues; changing the ſcene from Woods to the Sea, and from the life of Shepherds to that of Fiſhermen. But the innovation was ſo unhappy, that he has gained no followers. For the life of Fiſhermen is, obviouſly, much more hard and toilſome than that of Shepherds, and preſents to the fancy much leſs agreeable images. Flocks, and Trees, and Flowers, are objects of greater beauty, and more generally reliſhed by men, than fiſhes and marine productions. Of all the moderns, M. Geſner, a Poet of Switzerland, has been the moſt ſucceſsful in his Paſtoral Compoſitions. He has introduced into his Idylls (as he entitles them) many new ideas. His rural ſcenery is often ſtriking, and his deſcriptions are lively. He preſents paſtoral life to us, with all the embelliſhments of which it is ſuſceptible; but without any exceſs of refinement. What forms the chief merit of this Poet, is, that he writes to the heart; and has enriched the ſubject of his Idylls with incidents which give riſe to much tender ſentiment. Scenes of domeſtic felicity are beautifully painted. The mutual affection

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affection of huſbands and wives, of parents and children, of brothers and ſiſters, as well as of lovers, are diſplayed in a pleaſing and touching manner. From not underſtanding the language in which M. Geſner writes, I can be no judge of the Poetry of his Style: but, in the ſubject and conduct of his Paſtorals, he appears to me to have outdone all the Moderns.

Neither Mr. Pope's, nor Mr. Philips's Paſtorals do any great honour to the Engliſh Poetry. Mr. Pope's were compoſed in his youth; which may be an apology for other faults, but cannot well excuſe the barrenneſs that appears in them. They are written in remarkably ſmooth and flowing numbers: and this is their chief merit; for there is ſcarcely any thought in them which can be called his own; ſcarcely any deſcription, or any image of nature, which has the marks of being original or copied from nature herſelf; but a repetition of the common images that are to be found in Virgil, and in all Poets who write of rural themes. Philips attempted to be more ſimple and natural than Pope; but he wanted genius to ſupport his attempt, or to write agreeably. He, too, runs on the common and beaten topics; and endeavouring to be ſimple, he becomes flat and inſipid. There was no ſmall competition between theſe two Authors, at the time when their Paſtorals were publiſhed. In ſome Papers of the *Guardian*, great partiality was ſhewn to Philips, and high praiſe beſtowed upon him. Mr. Pope, reſenting this preference, under

a feigned name, procured a paper to be inſerted in the *Guardian*, wherein he ſeemingly carries on the plan of extolling Philips; but in reality ſatiriſes him moſt ſeverely with ironical praiſes; and, in an artful covered manner, gives the palm to himſelf*. About the ſame time, Mr. Gay publiſhed his Shepherd's Week, in Six Paſtorals, which are deſigned to ridicule that ſort of ſimplicity which Philips and his partizans extolled, and are, indeed, an ingenious burleſque of Paſtoral Writing, when it riſes no higher than the manners of modern clowns and ruſtics. Mr. Shenſtone's Paſtoral Ballad, in four parts, may juſtly be reckoned, I think, one of the moſt elegant Poems of this kind, which we have in Engliſh. LECT. XXXIX.

I HAVE not yet mentioned one form in which Paſtoral Writing has appeared in latter ages, that is, when extended into a Play, or regular Drama, where plot, characters, and paſſions, are joined with the ſimplicity and innocence of rural manners. This is the chief improvement which the Moderns have made on this ſpecies of Compoſition; and of this nature we have two Italian pieces, which are much celebrated, Guarini's Paſtor Fido, and Taſſo's Aminta. Both of theſe poſſeſs great beauties, and are entitled to the reputation they have gained. To the latter, the preference ſeems due, as being leſs intricate in the plot and conduct, and leſs ſtrained and

* See Guardian, No. 40.

affected

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affected in the ſentiments; and though not wholly free from Italian refinement (of which I already gave one inſtance, the worſt, indeed, that occurs in all the Poem), it is, on the whole, a performance of high merit. The ſtrain of the Poetry is gentle and pleaſing; and the Italian language contributes to add much of that ſoftneſs, which is peculiarly ſuited to Paſtoral*.

I MUST

* It may be proper to take notice here, that the charge againſt Taſſo for his points and conceits, has ſometimes been carried too far. Mr. Addiſon, for inſtance, in a Paper of the Guardian, cenſuring his Aminta, gives this example, "That "Sylvia enters adorned with a garland of flowers, and after "viewing herſelf in a fountain, breaks out in a ſpeech to the "flowers on her head, and tells them, that ſhe did not wear them "to adorn herſelf, but to make them aſhamed." "Whoever can "bear this," he adds, "may be aſſured that he has no taſte for "Paſtoral." Guard. No. 38. But Taſſo's Sylvia, in truth, makes no ſuch ridiculous figure, and we are obliged to ſuſpect that Mr. Addiſon had not read the Aminta. Daphne, a companion of Sylvia, appears in converſation with Thyrſis, the confident of Aminta, Sylvia's lover; and in order to ſhew him, that Sylvia was not ſo ſimple, or inſenſible to her own charms, as ſhe affected to be, gives him this inſtance; that ſhe had caught her one day adjuſting her dreſs by a fountain, and applying now one flower and now another to her neck; and after comparing their colours with her own, ſhe broke into a ſmile, as if ſhe had ſeemed to ſay, I will wear you, not for my ornaments, but to ſhew how much you yield to me; and when caught thus admiring herſelf, ſhe threw away her flowers, and bluſhed for ſhame.——This deſcription of the vanity of a rural coquette, is no more than what is natural, and very different from what the author of the Guardian repreſents it.

This cenſure on Taſſo was not originally Mr. Addiſon's. Bouhours, in his *Manière du bien penſer dans les ouvrages d'eſprit*, appears

I MUST not omit the mention of another Paſtoral Drama, which will bear being brought into compariſon LECT. XXXIX.

appears to have been the firſt who gave this miſrepreſentation of Sylvia's Speech, and founded a criticiſm on it. Fontenelle, in his Diſcourſe on Paſtoral Poetry, followed him in this criticiſm. Mr. Addiſon, or whoever was the Author of that Paper in the Guardian, copied from them both. Mr. Warton, in the Prefatory Diſcourſe to his tranſlation of Virgil's Eclogues, repeats the obſervation. Sylvia's Speech to the Flowers, with which ſhe was adorned, is always quoted as the flagrant inſtance of the falſe taſte of the Italian Poets. Whereas, Taſſo gives us no ſuch Speech of Sylvia's, but only informs us of what her companion ſuppoſed her to be thinking, or ſaying to herſelf, when ſhe was privately admiring her own beauty. After charging ſo many eminent Critics, for having fallen into this ſtrange inaccuracy, from copying one another, without looking into the Author whom they cenſure, it is neceſſary for me to inſert the paſſage which has occaſioned this remark. Daphne ſpeaks thus to Thyrſis:

Hora per dirti il ver, non mi reſolvo
Si Silvia è ſemplicetta, come pare
A le parole, a gli atti. Hier vidi un ſegno
Che me ne mette in dubbio. Io la trovai
La preſſo la cittade in quei gran prati,
Ove fra ſtagni grace un iſoletta,
Sovra eſſa un lago limpido e tranquillo,
Tutta pendente in atto, che parea
Vegheggiar ſe medeſma, e'nſieme inſieme
Chider conſiglio à l'acque, in qual maniera
Diſpor doveſſe in ſu la fronte i crini,
E ſovra i crini il velo, e ſovral velo
I ſior, che tenea in grembo; e ſpeſſo ſpeſſo
Hor prendeva un liguſtro, hor una roſa,
E l'accoſtava al bel candido collo,
A le guancie vermiglie, e de colori
Fea paragone; e poi, ſicome lieta
De la vittoria lampeggiava un riſo

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compariſon with any compoſition of this kind, in any language; that is, Allan Ramſay's Gentle Shepherd. It is a great diſadvantage to this beautiful Poem, that it is written in the old ruſtic dialect of Scotland, which, in a ſhort time, will probably be entirely obſolete, and not intelligible; and it is a further diſadvantage that it is ſo entirely formed on the rural manners of Scotland, that none but a native of that country can thoroughly underſtand, or reliſh it. But though ſubject to theſe local diſadvantages, which confine its reputation within narrow limits, it is full of ſo much natural deſcription, and tender ſentiments, as would do honour to any Poet. The characters are well drawn, the incidents affecting; the ſcenery and manners lively and juſt. It affords a ſtrong proof, both of the power which nature and ſimplicity poſſeſs, to reach the heart in every ſort of Writing; and of the variety of pleaſing characters and ſubjects, with which Paſtoral Poetry when properly managed, is capable of being enlivened.

Che parea che diceſſe; io pur vi vinco;
Ni porto voi per ornamento mio,
Ma porto voi ſol per vergogna voſtra.
Perche ſi veggia quanto mi cedete.
Ma mentre ella s'ornava, e vagheggiava
Rivolſi gli occhi a caſo, e ſi fu accorta
Ch'io di la m'era accorta, e vergognando,
Rizzoſi toſto, e i fior laſciò cadere:
In tanto io piu ridea del ſuo roſſore,
Ella piu s'arroſſia del riſo mio.

AMINTA. ATTO II. Sc. ii.

I PRO-

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I PROCEED next to treat of Lyric Poetry, or the Ode; a ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition which poſſeſſes much dignity, and in which many Writers have diſtinguiſhed themſelves, in every age. Its peculiar character is, that it is intended to be ſung, or accompanied with muſic. Its deſignation implies this. Ode is, in Greek, the ſame with Song or Hymn; and Lyric Poetry imports, that the Verſes are accompanied with a lyre, or muſical inſtrument. This diſtinction was not, at firſt, peculiar to any one ſpecies of Poetry. For, as I obſerved in the laſt Lecture, Muſic and Poetry were coëval, and were, originally, always joined together. But after their ſeparation took place, after Bards had begun to make Verſe Compoſitions, which were to be recited or read, not to be ſung, ſuch Poems as were deſigned to be ſtill joined with Muſic or Song, were, by way of diſtinction, called Odes.

IN the Ode, therefore, Poetry retains its firſt and moſt antient form; that form, under which the original Bards poured forth their enthuſiaſtic ſtrains, praiſed their Gods and their Heroes, celebrated their victories, and lamented their misfortunes. It is from this circumſtance, of the Ode's being ſuppoſed to retain its original union with Muſic, that we are to deduce the proper idea, and the peculiar qualities of this kind of Poetry. It is not diſtinguiſhed from other kinds, by the ſubjects on which it is employed; for theſe may be extremely various. I know no diſtinction of ſubject that belongs to it, except

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except that other Poems are often employed in the recital of actions, whereas ſentiments, of one kind or other, form, almoſt always, the ſubject of the Ode. But it is chiefly the ſpirit, the manner of its execution, that marks and characteriſes it. Muſic and Song naturally add to the warmth of Poetry. They tend to tranſport, in a higher degree, both the perſon who ſings and the perſons who hear. They juſtify, therefore, a bolder and more paſſionate ſtrain, than can be ſupported in ſimple recitation. On this is formed the peculiar character of the Ode. Hence, the enthuſiaſm that belongs to it, and the liberties it is allowed to take, beyond any other ſpecies of Poetry. Hence, that neglect of regularity, thoſe digreſſions, and that diſorder which it is ſuppoſed to admit; and which, indeed, moſt Lyric Poets have not failed ſufficiently to exemplify in their practice.

The effects of Muſic upon the mind are chiefly two; to raiſe it above its ordinary ſtate, and fill it with high enthuſiaſtic emotions; or to ſoothe, and melt it into the gentle pleaſurable feelings. Hence, the Ode may either aſpire to the former character of the ſublime and noble, or it may deſcend to the latter, of the pleaſant and the gay; and between theſe there is, alſo, a middle region, of the mild and temperate emotions, which the Ode may often occupy to advantage.

All Odes may be compriſed under four denominations. Firſt, Sacred Odes; Hymns addreſſed

addreſſed to God, or compoſed on religious ſubjects. Of this nature are the Pſalms of David, which exhibit to us this ſpecies of Lyric Poetry in its higheſt degree of perfection. Secondly, Heroic Odes, which are employed in the praiſe of heroes, and in the celebration of martial exploits and great actions. Of this kind are all Pindar's Odes, and ſome few of Horace's. Theſe two kinds ought to have ſublimity and elevation for their reigning character. Thirdly, Moral and Philoſophical Odes, where the ſentiments are chiefly inſpired by virtue, friendſhip, and humanity. Of this kind, are many of Horace's Odes, and ſeveral of our beſt modern Lyric Productions; and here the Ode poſſeſſes that middle region, which, as I obſerved, it ſometimes occupies. Fourthly, Feſtive and Amorous Odes, calculated merely for pleaſure and amuſement. Of this nature, are all Anacreon's; ſome of Horace's; and a great number of ſongs and modern productions, that claim to be of the Lyric ſpecies. The reigning character of theſe, ought to be elegance, ſmoothneſs, and gaiety. LECT. XXXIX.

One of the chief difficulties in compoſing Odes, ariſes from that enthuſiaſm which is underſtood to be a characteriſtic of Lyric Poetry. A profeſſed Ode, even of the moral kind, but more eſpecially if it attempt the ſublime, is expected to be enlivened and animated, in an uncommon degree. Full of this idea, the Poet, when he

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begins to write an Ode, if he has any real warmth of genius, is apt to deliver himſelf up to it, without controul or reſtraint; if he has it not, he ſtrains after it, and thinks himſelf bound to aſſume the appearance of being all fervour, and all flame. In either caſe he is in great hazard of becoming extravagant. The licentiouſneſs of writing without order, method, or connection, has infected the Ode more than any other ſpecies of Poetry. Hence, in the claſs of Heroic Odes, we find ſo few that one can read with pleaſure. The Poet is out of ſight in a moment. He gets up into the clouds; becomes ſo abrupt in his tranſitions; ſo eccentric and irregular in his motions, and of courſe ſo obſcure, that we eſſay in vain to follow him, or to partake of his raptures. I do not require, that an Ode ſhould be as regular in the ſtructure of its parts, as a Didactic, or an Epic Poem. But ſtill, in every compoſition, there ought to be a ſubject; there ought to be parts which make up a whole; there ſhould be a connection of thoſe parts with one another. The tranſitions from thought to thought may be light and delicate, ſuch as are prompted by a lively fancy; but ſtill they ſhould be ſuch as preſerve the connection of ideas, and ſhew the Author to be one who thinks, and not one who raves. Whatever authority may be pleaded for the incoherence and diſorder of Lyric Poetry, nothing can be more certain, than that any compoſition which is ſo irregular in its method, as to become obſcure to the bulk of

of Readers, is ſo much worſe upon that account *. LECT. XXXIX.

THE extravagant liberty which ſeveral of the modern Lyric Writers aſſume to themſelves in the Verſification, increaſes the diſorder of this ſpecies of Poetry. They prolong their periods to ſuch a degree, they wander through ſo many different meaſures, and employ ſuch a variety of long and ſhort lines, correſponding in rhyme at ſo great a diſtance from each other, that all ſenſe of melody is utterly loſt. Whereas Lyric

* "La plupart des ceux qui parlent de l'enthouſiaſme de "l'ode, en parlent comme s'ils étoient aux-mêmes dans le "trouble qu'ils veulent definir. Ce ne ſont que grands mots "de fureur divine, de tranſports de l'âme, de mouvemens, de "lumierès, qui mis bout-à-bout dans des phraſes pompeuſes, "ne produiſent pourtant aucune idée diſtincte. Si on les en "croit, l'eſſence de l'enthouſiaſme eſt de ne pouvoir-être com-"pris que par les eſprits du prémiere ordre, à la tête deſquels "ils ſe ſuppoſent, et dont ils excluent tous ceux que ôſent ne "les pas entendre. — Le beau déſordre de l'ode eſt un effet de "l'art; mais il faut prendre garde de donner trop d'étendue a "ce terme. On autoriſeroit par la tous les écarts imaginables. "Un poëte n'auroit plus qu'a exprimer avec force toutes les "penſées qui lui viendroient ſucceſſivement; il ſe tiendroit "diſpénſé d'en examiner le rapport, et de ſe faire un plan, dont "toutes les parties ſe pretaſſent mutuelement des beautés. "Il n'y auroit ni commencement, ni milieu, ni fin, dans ſon "ouvrage; et cependant l'auteur ſe croiroit d'autant plus ſub-"lime, qu'il ſeroit moins raiſonable. Mais qui produiroit une "pareille compoſition dans l'eſprit du lecteur? Elle ne laiſſeroit "qu'un étourdiſſement, cauſé par la magnificence et l'har-"monie des paroles, ſans y faire naître que des idées confuſes, "qui chaſſeroient l'une ou l'autre, au lieu de concourir enſemble "à fixer et à eclairer l'eſprit." OEUVRES DE M. DE LA MOTTE, Tome I. Diſcours ſur l'Ode.

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Compoſition ought, beyond every other ſpecies of Poetry, to pay attention to melody and beauty of ſound; and the Verſification of thoſe Odes may be juſtly accounted the beſt, which renders the harmony of the meaſure moſt ſenſible to every common ear.

Pindar, the great Father of Lyric Poetry, has been the occaſion of leading his imitators into ſome of the defects I have now mentioned. His genius was ſublime; his expreſſions are beautiful and happy; his deſcriptions pictureſque. But finding it a very barren ſubject to ſing the praiſes of thoſe who had gained the prize in the public games, he is perpetually digreſſive, and fills up his Poems with Fables of the Gods and Heroes, that have little connection either with his ſubject, or with one another. The antients admired him greatly; but as many of the hiſtories of particular families and cities to which he alludes, are now unknown to us, he is ſo obſcure, partly from his ſubjects, and partly from his rapid, abrupt manner of treating them, that, notwithſtanding the beauty of his expreſſion, our pleaſure in reading him is much diminiſhed. One would imagine, that many of his modern imitators thought the beſt way to catch his ſpirit, was to imitate his diſorder and obſcurity. In ſeveral of the choruſſes of Euripides and Sophocles, we have the ſame kind of Lyric Poetry as in Pindar, carried on with more clearneſs and connection, and at the ſame time with much ſublimity.

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Of all the writers of Odes, antient or modern, there is none, that, in point of correctneſs, harmony, and happy expreſſion, can vie with Horace. He has deſcended from the Pindaric rapture to a more moderate degree of elevation; and joins connected thought, and good ſenſe, with the higheſt beauties of Poetry. He does not often aſpire beyond that middle region, which I mentioned as belonging to the Ode; and thoſe Odes, in which he attempts the ſublime, are perhaps not always his beſt *. The peculiar character, in which he excels, is grace and elegance; and in this Style of Compoſition, no Poet has ever attained to a greater perfection than Horace. No Poet ſupports a moral ſentiment with more dignity, touches a gay one more happily, or poſſeſſes the art of trifling more agreeably when he chooſes to trifle. His language is ſo fortunate, that with a ſingle word or epithet, he often conveys a whole deſcription to the fancy. Hence he ever has been, and ever will continue to be, a favourite Author with all perſons of taſte.

Among the Latin Poets of later ages, there have been many imitators of Horace. One of

* There is no Ode whatever of Horace's, without great beauties. But though I may be ſingular in my opinion, I cannot help thinking that in ſome of thoſe Odes which have been much admired for ſublimity (ſuch as Ode iv. Lib. 4. "Qualem "miniſtrum fulminis alitem," &c.) there appears ſomewhat of a ſtrained and forced effort to be lofty. The genius of this amiable Poet ſhews itſelf, according to my judgment, to greater advantage, in themes of a more temperate kind.

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the moſt diſtinguiſhed is Caſimir, a Poliſh Poet of the laſt century, who wrote four books of Odes. In graceful eaſe of expreſſion, he is far inferior to the Roman. He oftener affects the ſublime; and in the attempt, like other Lyric Writers, frequently becomes harſh and unnatural. But, on ſeveral occaſions, he diſcovers a conſiderable degree of original genius, and poetical fire. Buchanan, in ſome of his Lyric Compoſitions, is very elegant and claſſical.

Among the French, the Odes of Jean Baptiſte Rouſſeau have been much and juſtly celebrated. They poſſeſs great beauty, both of ſentiment and expreſſion. They are animated, without being rhapſodical; and are not inferior to any poetical productions in the French language.

In our own Language, we have ſeveral Lyric Compoſitions of conſiderable merit. Dryden's Ode on St. Cecilia, is well known. Mr. Gray is diſtinguiſhed in ſome of his Odes, both for tenderneſs and ſublimity; and in Dodſley's Miſcellanies, ſeveral very beautiful Lyric Poems are to be found. As to profeſſed Pindaric Odes, they are, with a few exceptions, ſo incoherent, as ſeldom to be intelligible. Cowley, at all times harſh, is doubly ſo in his Pindaric Compoſitions. In his Anacreontic Odes, he is much happier. They are ſmooth and elegant; and, indeed, the moſt agreeable, and the moſt perfect, in their kind, of all Mr. Cowley's Poems.

LECTURE XL.

DIDACTIC POETRY—DESCRIPTIVE POETRY.

HAVING treated of Paſtoral and Lyric Poetry, I proceed next to Didactic Poetry; under which is included a numerous Claſs of Writings. The ultimate end of all Poetry, indeed of every Compoſition, ſhould be, to make ſome uſeful impreſſion on the mind. This uſeful impreſſion is moſt commonly made in Poetry, by indirect methods; as by fable, by narration, by repreſentation of characters; but Didactic Poetry openly profeſſes its intention of conveying knowledge and inſtruction. It differs therefore, in the form only, not in the ſcope and ſubſtance, from a philoſophical, a moral, or a critical treatiſe in Proſe. At the ſame time, by means of its form, it has ſeveral advantages over Proſe Inſtruction. By the charm of Verſification and Numbers, it renders inſtruction more agreeable; by the deſcriptions, epiſodes, and other embelliſhments, which it may interweave, it detains and engages the fancy; it fixes alſo uſeful circumſtances

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more deeply in the memory. Hence, it is a field, wherein a Poet may gain great honour, may display both much genius, and much knowledge and judgment.

It may be executed in different manners. The Poet may choose some instructive subject, and he may treat it regularly, and in form; or without intending a great or regular work, he may only inveigh against particular vices, or make some moral observations on human life and characters, as is commonly done in Satires and Epistles. All these come under the denomination of Didactic Poetry.

The highest species of it, is a regular treatise on some philosophical, grave, or useful subject. Of this nature we have several, both antient and modern, of great merit and character: such as Lucretius's six Books De Rerum Natura, Virgil's Georgics, Pope's Essay on Criticism, Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, Armstrong on Health, Horace's, Vida's, and Boileau's Art of Poetry.

In all such works, as instruction is the professed object, the fundamental merit consists in sound thought, just principles, clear and apt illustrations. The Poet must instruct; but he must study, at the same time, to enliven his instructions, by the introduction of such figures, and such circumstances, as may amuse the imagination, may conceal the dryness of his subject, and

and embelliſh it with poetical painting. Virgil, in his Georgics, preſents us here with a perfect model. He has the art of raiſing and beautifying the moſt trivial circumſtances in rural life. When he is going to ſay, that the labour of the country muſt begin in ſpring, he expreſſes himſelf thus: LECT. XL.

Vere novo, gelidus canis cum montibus humor
Liquitur, et Zephyro putris ſe gleba reſolvit;
Depreſſo incipiat jam tum mihi Taurus aratro
Ingemere, et ſulco attritus ſplendeſcere vomer *.

Instead of telling his huſbandman in plain language, that his crops will fail through bad management, his language is,

Heu magnum alterius fruſtra ſpectabis acervum,
Concuſſaque famen in ſylvis ſolabere quercu †.

Instead of ordering him to water his grounds, he preſents us with a beautiful landſcape:

* While yet the Spring is young, while earth unbinds
Her frozen boſom to the weſtern winds;
While mountain ſnows diſſolve againſt the Sun,
And ſtreams yet new from precipices run;
Ev'n in this early dawning of the year,
Produce the plough and yoke the ſturdy ſteer,
And goad him till he groans beneath his toil,
Till the bright ſhare is buried in the ſoil. DRYDEN.

† On others crops you may with envy look,
And ſhake for food the long abandoned oak. DRYDEN.

Ecce

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Ecce ſupercilio clivoſi tramitis undam
Elicit; illa cadens, raucum per lævia murmur
Saxa ciet; ſcatebriſque arentia temperat arva*.

In all Didactic Works, method and order is eſſentially requiſite; not ſo ſtrict and formal as in a proſe treatiſe; yet ſuch as may exhibit clearly to the Reader a connected train of inſtruction. Of the Didactic Poets, whom I before mentioned, Horace, in his Art of Poetry, is the one moſt cenſured for want of method. Indeed, if Horace be deficient in any thing throughout many of his Writings, it is in this, of not being ſufficiently attentive to juncture and connection of parts. He writes always with eaſe and gracefulneſs; but often in a manner ſomewhat looſe and rambling. There is, however, in that work, much good ſenſe and excellent criticiſm; and, if it be conſidered as intended for the regulation of the Roman Drama, which ſeems to have been the Author's chief purpoſe, it will be found to be a more complete and regular Treatiſe, than under the common notion of its being a Syſtem of the whole Poetical Art.

* Behold when burning ſuns, or Syrius' beams
Strike fiercely on the field and withering ſtems,
Down from the ſummit of the neighbouring hills,
O'er the ſmooth ſtones he calls the bubbling rills;
Soon as he clears whate'er their paſſage ſtay'd,
And marks their future current with his ſpade,
Before him ſcattering they prevent his pains,
And roll with hollow murmurs o'er the plains.

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With regard to Epiſodes and Embelliſhments, great liberty is allowed to Writers of Didactic Poetry. We ſoon tire of a continued ſeries of inſtructions, eſpecially in a poetical work, where we look for entertainment. The great art of rendering a Didactic Poem intereſting, is to relieve and amuſe the Reader, by connecting ſome agreeable Epiſodes with the principal ſubject. Theſe are always the parts of the work which are beſt known, and which contribute moſt to ſupport the reputation of the Poet. The principal beauties of Virgil's Georgics lie in digreſſions of this kind, in which the Author has exerted all the force of his genius; ſuch as the prodigies that attended the death of Julius Cæſar, the Praiſes of Italy, the Happineſs of a Country Life, the Fable of Ariſteus, and the moving Tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. In like manner, the favourite paſſages in Lucretius's work, and which alone could render ſuch a dry and abſtract ſubject tolerable in Poetry, are the Digreſſions on the Evils of Superſtition, the Praiſe of Epicurus and his Philoſophy, the Deſcription of the Plague, and ſeveral other incidental illuſtrations, which are remarkably elegant, and adorned with a ſweetneſs and harmony of Verſification peculiar to that Poet. There is indeed nothing in Poetry ſo entertaining or deſcriptive, but what a Didactic Writer of genius may be allowed to introduce in ſome part of his work; provided always, that ſuch Epiſodes ariſe naturally from the main ſubject; that they be not diſproportioned in length to it; and that the

LECT. XL. the Author know how to deſcend with propriety to the plain, as well as how to riſe to the bold and figured Style.

MUCH art may be ſhewn by a Didactic Poet, in connecting his Epiſodes happily with his ſubject. Virgil is alſo diſtinguiſhed for his addreſs in this point. After ſeeming to have left his huſbandmen, he again returns to them very naturally, by laying hold of ſome rural circumſtance, to terminate his digreſſion. Thus, having ſpoken of the battle of Pharſalia, he ſubjoins immediately, with much art:

Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus illis,
Agricolo, incurve terram molitus aratro.
Exeſa inveniet ſcabrâ rubigine pila:
Aut gravibus raſtris galeas pulſabit inanes,
Grandiaque effoſſis mirabitur oſſa ſepulchris *.

IN Engliſh, Dr. Akenſide has attempted the moſt rich and poetical form of Didactic Writing, in his Pleaſures of the Imagination; and though, in the execution of the whole, he is not equal, he has, in ſeveral parts, ſucceeded happily, and diſplayed much genius. Dr. Armſtrong, in his Art of Preſerving Health, has not aimed at ſo high a ſtrain as the other; but he is more equal,

* Then, after length of time, the lab'ring ſwains
Who turn the turf of theſe unhappy plains,
Shall ruſty arms from the plough'd furrows take,
And over empty helmets paſs the rake;
Amus'd at antique titles on the ſtones,
And mighty relics of gigantic bones. DRYDEN.

and maintains throughout a chaſte and correct elegance. LECT. XL.

Satires and Epiſtles naturally run into a more familiar Style, than ſolemn Philoſophical Poetry. As the manners and characters, which occur in ordinary life, are their ſubject, they require being treated with ſomewhat of the eaſe and freedom of converſation; and hence it is commonly the "muſa pedeſtris," which reigns in ſuch Compoſitions.

Satire, in its firſt ſtate among the Romans, had a form different from what it afterwards aſſumed. Its origin is obſcure, and has given occaſion to altercation among Critics. It ſeems to have been at firſt a relic of the Antient Comedy, written partly in Proſe, partly in Verſe, and abounding with ſcurrility. Ennius and Lucilius corrected its groſſneſs; and, at laſt, Horace brought it into that form, which now gives the denomination to Satirical Writing. Reformation of manners is the end which it profeſſes to have in view; and in order to this end, it aſſumes the liberty of boldly cenſuring vice and vicious characters. It has been carried on in three different manners, by the three great Antient Satiriſts, Horace, Juvenal, and Perſius. Horace's Style has not much elevation. He entitles his Satires, "Sermones," and ſeems not to have intended riſing much higher than Proſe put into numbers. His manner is eaſy and graceful. They are rather the follies and weakneſſes

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neſſes of mankind, than their enormous vices, which he chooſes for the object of his Satire. He reproves with a ſmiling aſpect; and while he moralizes like a ſound Philoſopher, diſcovers, at the ſame time, the politeneſs of a courtier. Juvenal is much more ſerious and declamatory. He has more ſtrength and fire, and more elevation of Style, than Horace; but is greatly inferior to him in gracefulneſs and eaſe. His Satire is more zealous, more ſharp and pointed, as being generally directed againſt more flagitious characters. As Scaliger ſays of him, "ardet, in-"ſtat, jugulat," whereas Horace's character is "admiſſus circum præcordia ludit." Perſius has a greater reſemblance of the force and fire of Juvenal, than of the politeneſs of Horace. He is diſtinguiſhed for ſentiments of noble and ſublime morality. He is a nervous and lively Writer; but withal, often harſh and obſcure.

Poetical Epiſtles, when employed on moral or critical ſubjects, ſeldom riſe into a higher ſtrain of Poetry than Satires. In the form of an Epiſtle, indeed, many other ſubjects may be handled, and either Love Poetry, or Elegiac, may be carried on; as in Ovid's Epiſtolæ Herodium, and his Epiſtolæ de Ponto. Such works as theſe are deſigned to be merely ſentimental; and as their merit conſiſts in being proper expreſſions of the paſſion or ſentiment which forms the ſubject, they may aſſume any tone of Poetry that is ſuited to it. But Didactic Epiſtles, of which I now ſpeak, ſeldom admit of much

much elevation. They are commonly intended as obſervations on Authors, or on Life and characters; in delivering which, the Poet does not purpoſe to compoſe a formal treatiſe, or to confine himſelf ſtrictly to regular method, but gives ſcope to his genius on ſome particular theme which, at the time, has prompted him to write. In all Didactic Poetry of this kind, it is an important rule, "quicquid precipes, eſto brevis." Much of the grace, both of Satirical and Epiſtolary Writing, conſiſts in a ſpirited conciſeneſs. This gives to ſuch compoſition an edge and a livelineſs, which ſtrike the fancy and keep attention awake. Much of their merit depends alſo on juſt and happy repreſentations of characters. As they are not ſupported by thoſe high beauties of deſcriptive and poetical language which adorn other compoſitions, we expect, in return, to be entertained with lively paintings of men and manners, which are always pleaſing; and in theſe, a certain ſprightlineſs and turn of wit finds its proper place. The higher ſpecies of Poetry ſeldom admit it; but here it is ſeaſonable and beautiful.

In all theſe reſpects, Mr. Pope's Ethical Epiſtles deſerve to be mentioned with ſignal honour, as a model, next to perfect, of this kind of Poetry. Here, perhaps, the ſtrength of his genius appeared. In the more ſublime parts of Poetry he is not ſo diſtinguiſhed. In the enthuſiaſm, the fire, the force and copiouſneſs of poetic genius, Dryden, though a much leſs correct

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rect Writer, appears to have been ſuperior to him. One can ſcarce think that he was capable of Epic or Tragic Poetry; but, within a certain limited region, he has been outdone by no Poet. His tranſlation of the Iliad will remain a laſting monument to his honour, as the moſt elegant and highly finiſhed tranſlation that, perhaps, ever was given of any poetical work. That he was not incapable of tender Poetry, appears from the Epiſtle of Eloiſa to Abelard, and from the Verſes to the Memory of an unfortunate Lady, which are almoſt his only ſentimental productions; and which indeed are excellent in their kind. But the qualities for which he is chiefly diſtinguiſhed are, judgment, and wit, with a conciſe and happy expreſſion, and a melodious verſification. Few Poets ever had more wit, and at the ſame time more judgment, to direct the proper employment of that wit. This renders his Rape of the Lock the greateſt maſterpiece that perhaps was ever compoſed, in the gay and ſprightly Style; and in his ſerious works, ſuch as his Eſſay on Man, and his Ethic Epiſtles, his wit juſt diſcovers itſelf as much, as to give a proper ſeaſoning to grave reflections. His imitations of Horace are ſo peculiarly happy, that one is at a loſs, whether moſt to admire the original, or the copy; and they are among the few imitations extant, that have all the grace and eaſe of an original. His paintings of characters are natural and lively in a high degree; and never was any Writer ſo happy in that conciſe ſpirited Style, which gives animation to

Satires

Satires and Epiſtles. We are never ſo ſenſible of the good effects of rhyme in Engliſh verſe, as in reading theſe parts of his works. We ſee it adding to the Style, an elevation which otherwiſe it could not have poſſeſſed; while at the ſame time he manages it ſo artfully, that it never appears in the leaſt to encumber him; but on the contrary, ſerves to increaſe the livelineſs of his manner. He tells us himſelf, that he could expreſs moral obſervations more conciſely, and therefore more forcibly, in rhyme, than he could do in Proſe. LECT. XL.

Among Moral and Didactic Poets, Dr. Young is of too great eminence to be paſſed over without notice. In all his works, the marks of ſtrong genius appear. His Univerſal Paſſion, poſſeſſes the full merit of that animated conciſeneſs of Style, and lively deſcription of characters, which I mentioned as particularly requiſite in Satirical and Didactic Compoſitions. Though his wit may often be thought too ſparkling, and his ſentences too pointed, yet the vivacity of his fancy is ſo great, as to entertain every Reader. In his Night Thoughts, there is much energy of expreſſion; in the three firſt, there are ſeveral pathetic paſſages; and ſcattered through them all, happy images and alluſions, as well as pious reflections, occur. But the ſentiments are frequently over-ſtrained, and turgid; and the Style is too harſh and obſcure to be pleaſing. Among French Authors, Boileau has undoubtedly much merit in Didactic Poetry.

LECT. XL. Their later Critics are unwilling to allow him any great ſhare of original genius, or poetic fire*. But his Art of Poetry, his Satires and Epiſtles, muſt ever be eſteemed eminent, not only for ſolid and judicious thought, but for correct and elegant poetical expreſſion, and fortunate imitation of the Antients.

From Didactic, I proceed next to treat of Deſcriptive Poetry, where the higheſt exertions of genius may be diſplayed. By Deſcriptive Poetry, I do not mean any one particular ſpecies or form of Compoſition. There are few Compoſitions of any length, that can be called purely deſcriptive, or wherein the Poet propoſes to himſelf no other object but merely to deſcribe, without employing narration, action, or moral ſentiment, as the ground-work of his piece. Deſcription is generally introduced as an embelliſhment, rather than made the ſubject of a regular work. But though it ſeldom form a ſeparate ſpecies of writing, yet into every ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition, Paſtoral, Lyric, Didactic, Epic, and Dramatic, it both enters and poſſeſſes in each of them a very conſiderable place; ſo that in treating of Poetry, it demands no ſmall attention.

Description is the great teſt of a Poet's imagination, and always diſtinguiſhes an original

* Vid. Poëtique Françoiſe de Marmontel.

from

from a ſecond-rate genius. To a Writer of the inferior claſs, Nature, when at any time he attempts to deſcribe it, appears exhauſted by thoſe who have gone before him in the ſame track. He ſees nothing new, or peculiar, in the object which he would paint; his conceptions of it are looſe and vague; and his expreſſions, of courſe, feeble and general. He gives us words rather than ideas; we meet with the language indeed of Poetical Deſcription, but we apprehend the object deſcribed very indiſtinctly. Whereas a true Poet makes us imagine that we ſee it before our eyes; he catches the diſtinguiſhing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in ſuch a light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a ſtrong imagination, which firſt receives a lively impreſſion of the object; and then, by employing a proper ſelection of circumſtances in deſcribing it, tranſmits that impreſſion in its full force to the imagination of others. LECT. XI.

In this ſelection of circumſtances, lies the great art of Picturesque Deſcription. In the firſt place, they ought not to be vulgar, and common ones, ſuch as are apt to paſs by without remark; but, as much as poſſible, new and original, which may catch the fancy, and draw attention. In the next place, they ought to be ſuch as particularize the object deſcribed, and mark it ſtrongly. No deſcription that reſts in generals can be good. For we can conceive no-

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thing clearly in the abſtract; all diſtinct ideas are formed upon particulars. In the third place, all the circumſtances employed ought to be uniform, and of a piece; that is, when deſcribing a great object, every circumſtance brought into view ſhould tend to aggrandize; or, when deſcribing a gay and pleaſant one, ſhould tend to beautify, that, by this means, the impreſſion may reſt upon the imagination, complete and entire; and laſtly, the circumſtances in deſcription ſhould be expreſſed with conciſeneſs, and with ſimplicity; for when either too much exaggerated, or too long dwelt upon and extended, they never fail to enfeeble the impreſſion that is deſigned to be made. Brevity, almoſt always, contributes to vivacity. Theſe general rules will be beſt underſtood by illuſtrations founded on particular inſtances.

Of all profeſſed Deſcriptive Compoſitions, the largeſt and fulleſt that I am acquainted with, in any language, is Mr. Thomſon's Seaſons; a work which poſſeſſes very uncommon merit. The ſtyle, in the midſt of much ſplendour and ſtrength, is ſometimes harſh, and may be cenſured as deficient in eaſe and diſtinctneſs. But notwithſtanding this defect, Thomſon is a ſtrong and beautiful Deſcriber: for he had a feeling heart, and a warm imagination. He had ſtudied and copied Nature with care. Enamoured of her beauties, he not only deſcribed them properly, but felt their impreſſion with ſtrong ſenſibility. The impreſſion which he felt, he tranſmits

mits to his Readers; and no perſon of taſte can peruſe any one of his Seaſons, without having the ideas and feelings which belong to that Seaſon, recalled, and rendered preſent to his mind. Several inſtances of moſt beautiful deſcription might be given from him; ſuch as, the ſhower in Spring, the morning in Summer, and the man periſhing in ſnow in Winter. But at preſent, I ſhall produce a paſſage of another kind, to ſhew the power of a ſingle well-choſen circumſtance, to heighten a deſcription. In his Summer, relating the effects of heat in the torrid zone, he is led to take notice of the Peſtilence that deſtroyed the Engliſh fleet, at Carthagena, under Admiral Vernon; when he has the following lines; LECT. XL.

—— you, gallant Vernon, ſaw
The miſerable ſcene; you pitying ſaw
To infant weakneſs ſunk the warrior's arms;
Saw the deep racking pang; the ghaſtly form;
The lip pale quiv'ring; and the beamleſs eye
No more with ardour bright; you heard the groans
Of agonizing ſhips from ſhore to ſhore;
Heard nightly plunged, amid the ſullen waves,
The frequent corſe.—— L. 1050.

All the circumſtances here are properly choſen, for ſetting this diſmal ſcene in a ſtrong light before our eyes. But what is moſt ſtriking in the picture, is the laſt image. We are conducted through all the ſcenes of diſtreſs, till we come to the mortality prevailing in the fleet, which a vulgar Poet would have deſcribed by exaggerated expreſſions, concerning the multi-

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plied trophies and victories of death. But, how much more is the imagination impreſſed by this ſingle circumſtance, of dead bodies, thrown overboard every night; of the conſtant ſound of their falling into the waters; and of the Admiral liſtening to this melancholy ſound, ſo often ſtriking his ear?

> Heard nightly plunged, amid the ſullen waves,
> The frequent corſe *.

Mr.

* The enlogium which Dr. Johnſon, in his Lives of the Poets, gives of Thomſon, is high, and, in my opinion, very juſt: "As a writer, he is entitled to one praiſe of the higheſt "kind; his mode of thinking, and of expreſſing his thoughts, "is original. His Blank Verſe is no more the Blank Verſe of "Milton, or of any other Poet, than the Rhimes of Prior are "the Rhimes of Cowley. His numbers, his pauſes, his diction, "are of his own growth, without tranſcription, without imita-"tion. He thinks in a peculiar train, and he thinks always as "a man of genius. He looks round on nature and life, with the "eye which nature beſtows only on a Poet; the eye that diſ-"tinguiſhes in every thing preſented to its view, whatever there "is on which imagination can delight to be detained; and with "a mind that at once comprehends the vaſt and attends to the "minute. The Reader of the Seaſons wonders that he never "ſaw before what Thomſon ſhews him, and that he never yet "has felt what Thomſon impreſſes. His deſcriptions of ex-"tended ſcenes, and general effects, bring before us the whole "magnificence of nature, whether pleaſing or dreadful. The "gaity of Spring, the ſplendour of Summer, the tranquillity "of Autumn, and the horror of Winter, take, in their turn, "poſſeſſion of the mind. The Poet leads us through the ap-"pearances of things, as they are ſucceſſively varied by the vi-"ciſſitudes of the year, and imparts to us ſo much of his own "enthuſiaſm, that our thoughts expand with his imagery, and "kindle with his ſentiments." The cenſure which the ſame eminent

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Mr. Parnell's Tale of the Hermit is conſpicuous, throughout the whole of it, for beautiful Deſcriptive Narration. The manner of the Hermit's ſetting forth to viſit the world; his meeting with a companion, and the houſes in which they are ſucceſſively entertained, of the vain man, the covetous man, and the good man, are pieces of very fine painting, touched with a light and delicate pencil, overcharged with no ſuperfluous colouring, and conveying to us a lively idea of the objects. But of all the Engliſh Poems in the Deſcriptive Style, the richeſt and moſt remarkable are Milton's Allegro and Penſeroſo. The collection of gay images on the one hand, and of melancholy ones on the other, exhibited in theſe two ſmall but inimitably fine Poems, are as exquiſite as can be conceived. They are, indeed, the ſtorehouſe whence many ſucceeding Poets have enriched their deſcriptions of ſimilar ſubjects; and they alone are ſufficient for illuſtrating the obſervations which I made concerning the proper ſelection of circumſtances in Deſcriptive Writing. Take, for inſtance, the following paſſage from the Penſeroſo:

——I walk unſeen
On the dry, ſmooth-ſhaven green,
To behold the wandering Moon,
Riding near her higheſt noon,

eminent Critic paſſes upon Thomſon's diction, is no leſs juſt and well founded, that "it is too exuberant, and may ſometimes "be charged with filling the ear more than the mind."

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Like one that had been led aſtray
Through the Heaven's wide pathleſs way,
And oft as if her head ſhe bow'd,
Stooping thro' a fleecy cloud.
Oft, on a plat of riſing ground,
I hear the far-off curfew ſound,
Over ſome wide watered ſhore,
Swinging ſlow with ſolemn roar:
Or, if the air will not permit,
Some ſtill removed place will fit,
Where glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom;
Far from all reſort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowſy charm,
To bleſs the doors from nightly harm;
Or let my lamp at midnight hour,
Be ſeen in ſome high lonely tower,
Where I may outwatch the Bear
With thrice great Hermes, or unſphere
The ſpirit of Plato to unfold
What worlds or what vaſt regions hold
Th' immortal mind, that hath forſook
Her manſion in his fleſhly nook;
And of thoſe Dæmons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under-ground.

HERE, there are no unmeaning general expreſſions; all is particular; all his pictureſque; nothing forced or exaggerated; but a ſimple ſtyle, and a collection of ſtrong expreſſive images, which are all of one claſs, and recal a number of ſimilar ideas of the melancholy kind: particularly the walk by moonlight; the ſound of the curfew-bell heard diſtant; the dying embers in the chamber; the bellman's call; and the lamp

lamp ſeen at midnight in the high lonely tower. We may obſerve too, the conciſeneſs of the Poet's manner. He does not reſt long on one circumſtance, or employ a great many words to deſcribe it; which always makes the impreſſion faint and languid; but placing it in one ſtrong point of view, full and clear before the Reader, he there leaves it. LECT. XL.

"FROM his ſhield and his helmet," ſays Homer, deſcribing one of his heroes in battle, "From his ſhield and his helmet, there ſparkled "an inceſſant blaze; like the autumnal ſtar, "when it appears in its brightneſs from the wa- "ters of the ocean." This is ſhort and lively: but when it comes into Mr. Pope's hand, it evaporates in three pompous lines, each of which repeats the ſame image in different words;

High on his helm celeſtial lightnings play,
His beamy ſhield emits a living ray;
Th' unwearied blaze inceſſant ſtreams ſupplies
Like the red ſtar that fires th' autumnal ſkies.

IT is to be obſerved, in general, that, in deſcribing ſolemn or great objects, the conciſe manner is, almoſt always, proper. Deſcriptions of gay and ſmiling ſcenes can bear to be more amplified and prolonged; as ſtrength is not the predominant quality expected in theſe. But where a ſublime or a pathetic impreſſion is intended to be made, energy is above all things required. The imagination ought then to be ſeized at once; and it is far more deeply impreſſed

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preſſed by one ſtrong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteneſs of laboured illuſtration.—"His face was without form, and dark." ſays Oſſian, deſcribing a ghoſt; "the ſtars dim "twinkling through his form; thrice he ſighed "over the hero; and thrice the winds of the "night roared around."

It deſerves attention too, that in deſcribing inanimate natural objects, the Poet, in order to enliven his deſcription, ought always to mix living beings with them. The ſcenes of dead and ſtill life are apt to pall upon us, if the Poet do not ſuggeſt ſentiments, and introduce life and action into his deſcription. This is well known to every Painter who is a maſter of his art. Seldom has any beautiful landſcape been drawn, without ſome human being repreſented on the canvas, as beholding it, or on ſome account concerned in it.

Hîc gelidi fontes, hîc mollia prata Lycori,
Hîc nemus; hîc ipſo tecum conſumerer ævo*.

The touching part of theſe fine lines of Virgil's is the laſt, which ſets before us the intereſt of two lovers in this rural ſcene. A long deſcription of the "*fontes*," the "*nemus*," and the

* Here cooling fountains roll thro' flow'ry meads;
Here woods, Lycoris, lift their verdant heads;
Here could I wear my careleſs life away,
And in thy arms inſenſibly decay.
VIRG. Ecl. X. WARTON.

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"*prata*," in the moſt poetical modern manner, would have been inſipid without this ſtroke, which, in a few words, brings home to the heart all the beauties of the place: "hic ipſo "tecum conſumerer ævo." It is a great beauty in Milton's Allegro, that it is all alive and full of perſons.

Every thing, as I before ſaid, in deſcription, ſhould be as marked and particular as poſſible, in order to imprint on the mind a diſtinct and complete image. A hill, a river, or a lake, riſes up more conſpicuous to the fancy, when ſome particular lake, or river, or hill, is ſpecified, than when the terms are left general. Moſt of the Antient Writers have been ſenſible of the advantage which this gives to deſcription. Thus, in that beautiful Paſtoral Compoſition, the Song of Solomon, the images are commonly particulariſed by the objects to which they allude. "It "is the roſe of Sharon; the lily of the vallies; "the flock which feeds on Mount Gilead; the "ſtream which comes from Mount Lebanon. "Come with me, from Lebanon, my Spouſe; "look from the top of Amana, from the top of "Shenir and Hermon, from the mountains of "the Leopards." Ch. iv. 8. So Horace:

Quid dedicatum poſcit Apollinem
Vates? quid orat de patera novum
Fundens liquorem? non opimas
Sardinæ ſegetes feracis;
Non æſtuoſæ grata Calabriæ
Armenta; non aurum aut ebur Indicum,

Non

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Non rura, quæ Liris quietâ
Mordet aquâ, taciturnus amnis*.

Lib. 1. Ode 31.

Both Homer and Virgil are remarkable for the talent of Poetical Deſcription. In Virgil's Second Æneid, where he deſcribes the burning and ſacking of Troy, the particulars are ſo well ſelected and preſented, that the Reader finds himſelf in the midſt of that ſcene of horror. The death of Priam, eſpecially, may be ſingled out as a maſterpiece of deſcription. All the circumſtances of the aged monarch arraying himſelf in armour, when he finds the enemy making themſelves maſters of the city; his meeting with his family, who are taking ſhelter at an altar in the court of the palace, and their placing him in the midſt of them; his indignation when he beholds Pyrrhus ſlaughtering one of his ſons; the feeble dart which he throws; with Pyrrhus's brutal behaviour, and his manner of putting the old man to death, are painted in the moſt affect-

* When at Appollo's hallowed ſhrine
The poet hails the pow'r divine,
And here his firſt libation pours,
What is the bleſſing he implores?
He nor deſires the ſwelling grain,
That yellow o'er Sardinia's plain,
Nor the fair herds that lowing feed
On warm Calabria's flowery mead;
Nor ivory of ſpotleſs ſhine;
Nor gold forth flaming from the mine;
Nor the rich fields that Liris laves,
And eats away with ſilent waves. Francis.

ing

ing manner, and with a maſterly hand. All Homer's battles, and Milton's account, both of Paradiſe and of the Infernal Regions, furniſh many beautiful inſtances of Poetical Deſcription. Oſſian, too, paints in ſtrong and lively colours, though he employs few circumſtances; and his chief excellency lies in painting to the heart. One of his fulleſt Deſcriptions is, the following of the ruins of Balclutha: "I have ſeen the "walls of Balclutha, but they were deſolate. "The fire had reſounded within the halls; and "the voice of the people is now heard no more. "The ſtream of Clutha was removed from its "place by the fall of the walls; the thiſtle "ſhook there its lonely head; the moſs whiſtled "to the wind. The fox looked out at the win-"dow; the rank graſs waved round his head. "Deſolate is the dwelling of Moina. Silence "is in the houſe of her fathers." Shakeſpeare cannot be omitted on this occaſion, as ſingularly eminent for painting with the pencil of nature. Though it be in manners and characters that his chief excellency lies, yet his ſcenery alſo is often exquiſite, and happily deſcribed by a ſingle ſtroke, as in that fine line of the "Merchant of Venice," which conveys to the fancy as natural and beautiful an image as can poſſibly be exhibited in ſo few words:

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> How ſweet the moonlight ſleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we ſit, &c.

Much of the beauty of deſcriptive Poetry depends upon a right choice of Epithets. Many Poets,

LECT. XL. Poets, it muſt be confeſſed, are too careleſs in this particular. Epithets are frequently brought in merely to complete the verſe, or make the rhyme anſwer; and hence they are ſo unmeaning and redundant; expletive words only, which, in place of adding any thing to the deſcription, clog and enervate it. Virgil's "Liquidi fontes," and Horace's "Prata canis "albicant pruinis," muſt, I am afraid, be aſſigned to this claſs; for, to denote by an epithet that water is liquid, or that ſnow is white, is no better than mere tautology. Every epithet ſhould either add a new idea to the word which it qualifies, or at leaſt ſerve to raiſe and heighten its known ſignification. So in Milton,

——Who ſhall attempt with wandering feet
The dark, unbottom'd, infinite abyſs,
And through the palpable obſcure, find out
His uncouth way? or ſpread his airy flight,
Upborn with indefatigable wings,
Over the vaſt abrupt? B. II.

The epithets employed here plainly add ſtrength to the deſcription, and aſſiſt the fancy in conceiving it;—the wandering feet—the unbottomed abyſs—the palpable obſcure—the uncouth way—the indefatigable wing—ſerve to render the images more complete and diſtinct. But there are many general epithets, which, though they appear to raiſe the ſignification of the word to which they are joined, yet leave it ſo undetermined, and are now become ſo trite and

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and beaten in poetical language, as to be perfectly inſipid. Of this kind are "barbarous diſcord—hateful envy—mighty chiefs—bloody war—gloomy ſhades—direful ſcenes," and a thouſand more of the ſame kind which we meet with occaſionally in good Poets; but with which Poets of inferior genius abound every where, as the great props of their affected ſublimity. They give a ſort of ſwell to the language, and raiſe it above the tone of proſe; but they ſerve not in the leaſt to illuſtrate the object deſcribed; on the contrary, they load the Style with a languid verboſity.

Sometimes it is in the power of a Poet of genius, by one well-choſen epithet, to accompliſh a deſcription, and by means of a ſingle word, to paint a whole ſcene to the fancy. We may remark this effect of an epithet in the following fine lines of Milton's Lycidas:

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorſeleſs deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the ſteep,
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the ſhaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva ſpreads her wizard ſtream.

Among theſe wild ſcenes, "Deva's wizard ſtream" is admirably imaged; by this one word, preſenting to the fancy all the romantic ideas, of a river floating through a deſolate country, with banks haunted by wizards and enchanters. Akin to this is an epithet which Horace

LECT. XL. Horace gives to the river Hydaſpes. A good man, ſays he, ſtands in need of no arms:

Sive per Syrtes iter æſtuoſas,
Sive facturus per inhoſpitalem
Caucaſum; vel quæ loca fabuloſus
Lambit Hydaſpes*.

This epithet "fabuloſus" one of the commentators on Horace has changed into "ſabuloſus" or ſandy; ſubſtituting, by a ſtrange want of taſte, the common and trivial epithet of the ſandy river, in place of that beautiful picture which the Poet gives us, by calling Hydaſpes the Romantic River, or the ſcene of Adventures and Poetic Tales.

VIRGIL has employed an epithet with great beauty and propriety, when accounting for Dædalus not having engraved the fortune of his ſon Icarus:

Bis conatus erat caſus effingere in auro,
Bis patriæ cecidêre manus†. ÆN. VI.

* Whether through Lybia's burning ſands
Our journey leads, or Scythia's lands,
Amidſt th' inhoſpitable waſte of ſnows,
Or where the fabulous Hydaſpes flows. FRANCIS.

† Here hapleſs Icarus had found his part,
Had not the father's grief reſtrain'd his art;
He twice eſſay'd to caſt his ſon in gold,
Twice from his hand he drop'd the forming mould.
DRYDEN.

In this tranſlation the thought is juſtly given; but the beauty of the expreſſion "patriæ manus," which in the original conveys the thought with ſo much tenderneſs, is loſt.

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These inſtances, and obſervations, may give ſome juſt idea of true poetical deſcription. We have reaſon always to diſtruſt an Author's deſcriptive talents, when we find him laborious and turgid, amaſſing common-place epithets and general expreſſions, to work up a high conception of ſome object, of which, after all, we can form but an indiſtinct idea. The beſt deſcribers are ſimple and conciſe. They ſet before us ſuch features of an object, as, on the firſt view, ſtrike and warm the fancy: they give us ideas which a Statuary or a Painter could lay hold of, and work after them; which is one of the ſtrongeſt and moſt deciſive trials of the real merit of Deſcription.

LECTURE XLI.

THE POETRY OF THE HEBREWS.

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AMONG the various kinds of Poetry, which we are, at preſent, employed in examining, the Antient Hebrew Poetry, or that of the Scriptures, juſtly deſerves a place. Viewing theſe ſacred books in no higher light, than as they preſent to us the moſt antient monuments of Poetry extant at this day in the world, they afford a curious object of Criticiſm. They diſplay the taſte of a remote age and country. They exhibit a ſpecies of Compoſition, very different from any other with which we are acquainted, and, at the ſame time, beautiful. Conſidered as Inſpired Writings, they give riſe to diſcuſſions of another kind. But it is our buſineſs, at preſent, to conſider them not in a theological, but in a critical view: and it muſt needs give pleaſure, if we ſhall find the beauty and dignity of the Compoſition adequate to the weight and importance of the matter. Dr. Lowth's

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Lowth's learned Treatiſe, "De Sacra Poëſi Hebræorum," ought to be peruſed by all who deſire to become thoroughly acquainted with this ſubject. It is a work exceedingly valuable, both for the elegance of its compoſition, and for the juſtneſs of the criticiſm which it contains. In this Lecture, as I cannot illuſtrate the ſubject with more benefit to the Reader, than by following the tract of that ingenious Author, I ſhall make much uſe of his obſervations.

I NEED not ſpend many words in ſhowing, that among the books of the Old Teſtament there is ſuch an apparent diverſity in Style, as ſufficiently diſcovers, which of them are to be conſidered as Poetical, and which, as Proſe Compoſitions. While the hiſtorical books, and legiſlative writings of Moſes, are evidently Proſaic in the compoſition, the Book of Job, the Pſalms of David, the Song of Solomon, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a great part of the Prophetical Writings, and ſeveral paſſages ſcattered occaſionally through the hiſtorical books, carry the moſt plain and diſtinguiſhing marks of Poetical Writing.

THERE is not the leaſt reaſon for doubting, that originally theſe were written in verſe, or ſome kind of meaſured numbers; though as the antient pronunciation of the Hebrew Language is now loſt, we are not able to aſcertain the nature of the Hebrew verſe, or at moſt can aſcertain it but imperfectly. Concerning this point

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there have been great controverſies among learned men, which it is unneceſſary to our preſent purpoſe to diſcuſs. Taking the Old Teſtament in our own Tranſlation, which is extremely literal, we find plain marks of many parts of the original being written in a meaſured Style; and the "disjecta membra poëtæ" often ſhow themſelves. Let any perſon read the Hiſtorical Introduction to the book of Job, contained in the firſt and ſecond chapters, and then go on to Job's ſpeech in the beginning of the third chapter, and he cannot avoid being ſenſible, that he paſſes all at once from the region of proſe to that of Poetry. Not only the poetical ſentiments, and the figured Style, warn him of the change; but the cadence of the ſentence, and the arrangement of the words, are ſenſibly altered; the change is as great as when he paſſes from reading Cæſar's Commentaries, to read Virgil's Æneid. This is ſufficient to ſhow that the Sacred Scriptures contain, what muſt be called poetry in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of that word; and I ſhall afterwards ſhow, that they contain inſtances of moſt of the different forms of Poetical Writing. It may be proper to remark, in paſſing, that hence ariſes a moſt invincible argument in honour of Poetry. No perſon can imagine that to be a frivolous and contemptible art, which has been employed by Writers under divine inſpiration, and has been choſen as a proper channel for conveying to the world the knowledge of divine truth.

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From the earlieſt times, Muſic and Poetry were cultivated among the Hebrews. In the days of the Judges, mention is made of the Schools or Colleges of the Prophets; where one part of the employment of the perſons trained in ſuch ſchools was, to ſing the praiſes of God, accompanied with various inſtruments. In the firſt book of Samuel (chap. x. 7.) we find, on a public occaſion, a company of theſe Prophets coming down from the hill where their ſchool was, "propheſying," it is ſaid, "with the "pſaltery, tabret, and harp before them." But in the days of King David, Muſic and Poetry were carried to their greateſt height. For the ſervice of the tabernacle, he appointed four thouſand Levites, divided into twenty-four courſes, and marſhalled under ſeveral leaders, whoſe ſole buſineſs it was to ſing Hymns, and to perform the inſtrumental Muſic in the public worſhip. Aſaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, were the chief directors of the Muſic; and, from the titles of ſome Pſalms, it would appear that they were alſo eminent compoſers of Hymns or Sacred Poems. In chapter xxv. of the firſt book of Chronicles, an account is given of David's inſtitutions, relating to the Sacred Muſic and Poetry; which were certainly more coſtly, more ſplendid and magnificent, than ever obtained in the public ſervice of any other nation.

The general conſtruction of the Hebrew Poetry is of a ſingular nature, and peculiar to itſelf. It conſiſts in dividing every period into corre-

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ſpondent, for the moſt part into equal members, which anſwer to one another, both in ſenſe and ſound. In the firſt member of the period a ſentiment is expreſſed; and in the ſecond member, the ſame ſentiment is amplified, or is repeated in different terms, or ſometimes contraſted with its oppoſite; but in ſuch a manner that the ſame ſtructure and nearly the ſame number of words is preſerved. This is the general ſtrain of all the Hebrew Poetry. Inſtances of it occur every where on opening the Old Teſtament. Thus, in Pſalm xcvi. "Sing unto the Lord a new "ſong—Sing unto the Lord, all the earth. "Sing unto the Lord, and bleſs his name— "ſhew forth his ſalvation from day to day. "Declare his glory among the heathen—his "wonders among all the people. For the Lord "is great, and greatly to be praiſed—He is "to be feared above all the Gods. Honour and "majeſty are before him—Strength and beauty "are in his ſanctuary." It is owing, in a great meaſure, to this form of Compoſition that our verſion, though in Proſe, retains ſo much of a poetical caſt. For the verſion being ſtrictly word for word after the original, the form and order of the original ſentence are preſerved; which by this artificial ſtructure, this regular alternation and correſpondence of parts, makes the ear ſenſible of a departure from the common Style and Tone of Proſe.

THE origin of this form of Poetical Compoſition among the Hebrews, is clearly to be deduced from

from the manner in which their Sacred Hymns were wont to be ſung. They were accompanied with muſic, and they were performed by choirs or bands of ſingers and muſicians, who anſwered alternately to each other. When, for inſtance, one band began the Hymn thus: "The Lord "reigneth, let the earth rejoice;" the chorus, or ſemi-chorus, took up the correſponding verſicle, "Let the multitude of the iſles be glad "thereof."——"Clouds and darkneſs are round "about him," ſung the one; the other replied, "Judgment and righteouſneſs are the habita- "tion of his throne." And in this manner their Poetry, when ſet to muſic, naturally divided itſelf into a ſucceſſion of ſtrophes and antiſtrophes correſpondent to each other; whence, it is probable, the Antiphon, or Reſponſory, in the public religious ſervice of ſo many Chriſtian churches, derived its origin.

We are expreſsly told, in the book of Ezra, that the Levites ſung in this manner: "Alter- "natim," or by courſe (Ezra, iii. 11.); and ſome of David's Pſalms bear plain marks of their being compoſed in order to be thus performed. The 24th Pſalm, in particular, which is thought to have been compoſed on the great and ſolemn occaſion of the Ark of the Covenant being brought back to Mount Zion, muſt have had a noble effect when performed after this manner, as Dr. Lowth has illuſtrated it. The whole people are ſuppoſed to be attending the proceſſion. The Levites and Singers, divided into

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their ſeveral courſes, and accompanied with all their muſical Inſtruments, led the way. After the Introduction to the Pſalm, in the two firſt verſes, when the proceſſion begins to aſcend the ſacred Mount, the queſtion is put, as by a ſemi-chorus, "Who ſhall aſcend unto the hill of the "Lord, and who ſhall ſtand in his holy place?" The reſponſe is made by the full chorus with the greateſt dignity: "He that hath clean hands "and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his "ſoul to vanity, nor ſworn deceitfully." As the proceſſion approaches to the doors of the Tabernacle, the chorus, with all their inſtruments, join in this exclamation: "Lift up your "heads, ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye ever-"laſting doors, and the King of Glory ſhall "come in." Here the ſemi-chorus plainly breaks in, as with a lower voice, "Who is this "King of Glory?" and at the moment when the Ark is introduced into the Tabernacle, the reſponſe is made by the burſt of the whole chorus: "The Lord, ſtrong and mighty; the Lord, "mighty in battle." I take notice of this inſtance the rather, as it ſerves to ſhow how much of the grace and magnificence of the Sacred Poems, as indeed of all Poems, depends upon our knowing the particular occaſions for which they were compoſed, and the particular circumſtances to which they were adapted; and how much of this beauty muſt now be loſt to us, through our imperfect acquaintance with many particulars of the Hebrew hiſtory, and Hebrew rites.

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THE method of Compoſition which has been explained, by correſpondent verſicles being univerſally introduced into the Hymns or muſical Poetry of the Jews, eaſily ſpread itſelf through their other Poetical Writings, which were not deſigned to be ſung in alternate portions, and which therefore did not ſo much require this mode of Compoſition. But the mode became familiar to their ears, and carried with it a certain ſolemn majeſty of Style, particularly ſuited to ſacred ſubjects. Hence, throughout the Prophetical Writings, we find it prevailing as much as in the Pſalms of David; as, for inſtance, in the Prophet Iſaiah (chap. xl. 1.) "Ariſe, ſhine, "for thy light is come, and the glory of the "Lord is riſen upon thee: For, lo; darkneſs "ſhall cover the earth, and groſs darkneſs the "people. But the Lord ſhall riſe upon thee, "and his glory ſhall be ſeen upon thee, and the "Gentiles ſhall come to thy light, and kings to "the brightneſs of thy riſing." This form of writing is one of the great characteriſtics of the antient Hebrew Poetry; very different from, and even oppoſite to, the Style of the Greek and Roman Poets.

INDEPENDENTLY of this peculiar mode of conſtruction, the Sacred Poetry is diſtinguiſhed by the higheſt beauties of ſtrong, conciſe, bold, and figurative expreſſion.

CONCISENESS and ſtrength, are two of its moſt remarkable characters. One might indeed at firſt imagine,

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imagine, that the practice of the Hebrew Poets, of always amplifying the ſame thought, by repetition or contraſt, might tend to enfeeble their Style. But they conduct themſelves ſo as not to produce this effect. Their ſentences are always ſhort. Few ſuperfluous words are uſed. The ſame thought is never dwelt upon long. To their conciſeneſs and ſobriety of expreſſion, their poetry is indebted for much of its ſublimity; and all Writers who attempt the ſublime, might profit much, by imitating in this reſpect, the Style of the Old Teſtament. For, as I have formerly had occaſion to ſhow, nothing is ſo great an enemy to the Sublime, as prolixity or diffuſeneſs. The mind is never ſo much affected by any great idea that is preſented to it, as when it is ſtruck all at once; by attempting to prolong the impreſſion, we at the ſame time weaken it. Moſt of the antient original Poets of all nations are ſimple and conciſe. The ſuperfluities and excreſcences of Style were the reſult of imitation in after-times; when Compoſition paſſed into inferior hands, and flowed from art and ſtudy, more than from native genius.

No Writings whatever abound ſo much with the moſt bold and animated figures, as the Sacred Books. It is proper to dwell a little upon this article; as, through our early familiarity with theſe books, a familiarity too often with the ſound of the words, rather than with their ſenſe and meaning, beauties of Style eſcape us in the Scripture, which, in any other

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book, would draw particular attention. Metaphors, Compariſons, Allegories, and Perſonifications, are there particularly frequent. In order to do juſtice to theſe, it is neceſſary that we tranſport ourſelves as much as we can into the land of Judæa; and place before our eyes that ſcenery, and thoſe objects with which the Hebrew Writers were converſant. Some attention of this kind is requiſite, in order to reliſh the writings of any Poet of a foreign country, and a different age. For the imagery of every good Poet is copied from nature and real life; if it were not ſo, it could not be lively; and therefore, in order to enter into the propriety of his images, we muſt endeavour to place ourſelves in his ſituation. Now we ſhall find, that the Metaphors and Compariſons of the Hebrew Poets preſent to us a very beautiful view of the natural objects of their own country, and of the arts and employments of their common life.

Natural objects are in ſome meaſure common to them with Poets of all ages and countries. Light and darkneſs, trees and flowers, the foreſt and the cultivated field, ſuggeſt to them many beautiful figures. But, in order to reliſh their figures of this kind, we muſt take notice, that ſeveral of them ariſe from the particular circumſtances of the land of Judea. During the ſummer months, little or no rain falls throughout all that region. While the heats continued, the country was intolerably parched; want of water was a great diſtreſs; and

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and a plentiful ſhower falling or a rivulet breaking forth, altered the whole face of nature, and introduced much higher ideas of refreſhment and pleaſure, than the like cauſes can ſuggeſt to us. Hence, to repreſent diſtreſs, ſuch frequent alluſions among them, "to a dry and thirſty "land, where no water is;" and hence, to deſcribe a change from diſtreſs to proſperity, their metaphors are founded on the falling of ſhowers, and the burſting out of ſprings in the deſart. Thus in Iſaiah, "The wilderneſs and the ſoli-"tary place ſhall be glad, and the deſart ſhall "rejoice and bloſſom as the roſe. For in the "wilderneſs ſhall waters break out, and ſtreams "in the deſart; and the parched ground "ſhall become a pool, and the thirſty land, "ſprings of water; in the habitation of dragons "there ſhall be graſs, with ruſhes and reeds." Chap. xxxv. 1. 6, 7. Images of this nature are very familiar to Iſaiah, and occur in many parts of his Book.

Again, as Judea was a hilly country, it was, during the rainy months, expoſed to frequent inundations by the ruſhing of torrents, which came down ſuddenly from the mountains, and carried every thing before them; and Jordan, their only great river, annually overflowed its banks. Hence the frequent alluſions to "the "noiſe, and to the ruſhings of many waters;" and hence great calamities ſo often compared to the overflowing torrent, which, in ſuch a country, muſt have been images particularly ſtriking:

"Deep

" Deep calleth unto deep at the noiſe of thy
" water-ſpouts; all thy waves and thy billows
" are gone over me." Pſalm xlii. 7.

THE two moſt remarkable mountains of the country, were Lebanon and Carmel: the former noted for its height, and the woods of lofty cedars that covered it; the latter, for its beauty and fertility, the richneſs of its vines and olives. Hence, with the greateſt propriety, Lebanon is employed as an image of whatever is great, ſtrong, or magnificent: Carmel of what is ſmiling and beautiful. " The glory of Lebanon," ſays Iſaiah, " ſhall be given to it, and the excel-
" lency of Carmel." (xxxv. 2.) Lebanon is often put metaphorically for the whole ſtate or people of Iſrael, for the temple, for the king of Aſſyria; Carmel, for the bleſſings of peace and proſperity. " His countenance is as Lebanon," ſays Solomon, ſpeaking of the dignity of man's appearance; but when he deſcribes female beauty, " Thine head is like mount Carmel." Song, v. 15. and vii. 5.

IT is farther to be remarked under this head, that in the images of the awful and terrible kind, with which the Sacred Poets abound, they plainly draw their deſcriptions from that violence of the elements, and thoſe concuſſions of nature, with which their climate rendered them acquainted. Earthquakes were not unfrequent; and the tempeſts of hail, thunder, and lightning, in Judæa and Arabia, accompanied with whirlwinds

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whirlwinds and darkneſs, far exceed any thing of that ſort which happens in more temperate regions. Iſaiah deſcribes, with great majeſty, the earth "reeling to and fro like a drunkard, "and removed like a cottage." (xxiv. 20.) And in thoſe circumſtances of terror, with which an appearance of the Almighty is deſcribed in the 18th Pſalm, when his "pavilion round about "him was darkneſs; when hailſtones and coals "of fire were his voice; and when, at his re-"buke, the channels of the waters are ſaid to be "ſeen, and the foundations of the hills diſco-"vered;" though there may be ſome reference, as Dr. Lowth thinks, to the hiſtory of God's deſcent upon Mount Sinai, yet it ſeems more probable, that the figures were taken directly from thoſe commotions of nature with which the Author was acquainted, and which ſuggeſted ſtronger and nobler images than what now occur to us.

Besides the natural objects of their own country, we find the rites of their religion, and the arts and employments of their common life, frequently employed as grounds of imagery among the Hebrews. They were a people chiefly occupied with agriculture and paſturage. Theſe were arts held in high honour among them; not diſdained by their patriarchs, kings, and prophets. Little addicted to commerce, ſeparated from the reſt of the world by their laws and their religion; they were, during the better days of their ſtate, ſtrangers in a great meaſure to

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to the refinements of luxury. Hence flowed, of courſe, the many alluſions to paſtoral life, to the "green paſtures and the ſtill waters," and to the care and watchfulneſs of a ſhepherd over his ſtock, which carry to this day ſo much beauty and tenderneſs in them, in the 23d Pſalm, and in many other paſſages of the Poetical Writings of Scripture. Hence, all the images founded upon rural employments, upon the wine-preſs, the threſhing-floor, the ſtubble and the chaff. To diſreliſh all ſuch images, is the effect of falſe delicacy. Homer is at leaſt as frequent, and much more minute and particular in his ſimiles, founded on what we now call low life; but, in his management of them, far inferior to the Sacred Writers, who generally mix with their compariſons of this kind ſomewhat of dignity and grandeur to ennoble them. What inexpreſſible grandeur does the following rural image in Iſaiah, for inſtance, receive from the intervention of the Deity: "The nations "ſhall ruſh like the ruſhings of many waters; "but God ſhall rebuke them, and they ſhall fly "far off: and they ſhall be chaſed as the chaff "of the mountain before the wind, and like "the down of the thiſtle before the whirl-"wind."

FIGURATIVE alluſions too, we frequently find, to the rites and ceremonies of their religion; to the legal diſtinctions of things clean and unclean; to the mode of their Temple Service; to the dreſs of their Prieſts, and to the moſt noted

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noted incidents recorded in their Sacred History; as to the deſtruction of Sodom, the deſcent of God upon Mount Sinai, and the miraculous paſſage of the Iſraelites through the Red Sea. The religion of the Hebrews included the whole of their laws, and civil conſtitution. It was full of ſplendid external rites, that occupied their ſenſes; it was connected with every part of their national hiſtory and eſtabliſhment; and hence, all ideas founded on religion, poſſeſſed in this nation a dignity and importance peculiar to themſelves, and were uncommonly fitted to impreſs the imagination.

From all this it reſults, that the imagery of the Sacred Poets is, in a high degree, expreſſive and natural; it is copied directly from real objects, that were before their eyes; it has this advantage, of being more complete within itſelf, more entirely founded on national ideas and manners, than that of moſt other Poets. In reading their works, we find ourſelves continually in the land of Judea. The palm-trees, and the cedars of Lebanon, are ever riſing in our view. The face of their territory, the circumſtances of their climate, the manners of the people, and the auguſt ceremonies of their religion, conſtantly paſs under different forms before us.

The compariſons employed by the Sacred Poets are generally ſhort, touching on one point only of reſemblance, rather than branching out into little Epiſodes. In this reſpect, they have

perhaps an advantage over the Greek and Roman Authors; whoſe compariſons, by the length to which they are extended, ſometimes interrupt the narration too much, and carry too viſible marks of ſtudy and labour. Whereas, in the Hebrew Poets, they appear more like the glowings of a lively fancy, juſt glancing aſide to ſome reſembling object, and preſently returning to its track. Such is the following fine compariſon, introduced to deſcribe the happy influence of good government upon a people, in what are called the laſt words of David, recorded in the 2d book of Samuel (xxiii. 3.): "He that ruleth "over men muſt be juſt, ruling in the fear of "God; and he ſhall be as the light of the "morning, when the ſun riſeth; even a morn-"ing without clouds; as the tender graſs "ſpringing out of the earth, by clear ſhining "after rain." This is one of the moſt regular and formal compariſons in the Sacred Books.

Allegory, likewiſe, is a figure frequently found in them. When formerly treating of this figure, I gave for an inſtance of it, that remarkably fine and well-ſupported Allegory, which occurs in the 80th Pſalm, wherein the People of Iſrael are compared to a vine. Of Parables, which form a ſpecies of Allegory, the Prophetical Writings are full: and if to us they ſometimes appear obſcure, we muſt remember, that in thoſe early times, it was univerſally the mode throughout all the eaſtern nations, to convey

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ſacred truths under myſterious figures and repreſentations.

But the Poetical Figure, which beyond all others, elevates the ſtyle of Scripture, and gives it a peculiar boldneſs and ſublimity, is Proſopopœia or Perſonification. No perſonifications employed by any Poets, are ſo magnificent and ſtriking as thoſe of the Inſpired Writers. On great occaſions, they animate every part of nature; eſpecially, when any appearance or operation of the Almighty is concerned. "Before "him went the peſtilence—the waters ſaw "thee, O God, and were afraid—the moun-"tains ſaw thee, and they trembled.—The "overflowing of the water paſſed by;—the "deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his "hands on high." When enquiry is made about the place of wiſdom, Job introduces the "Deep, ſaying, it is not in me; and the ſea "ſaith, it is not in me. Deſtruction and death "ſay, we have heard the fame thereof with "our ears." That noted ſublime paſſage in the Book of Iſaiah, which deſcribes the fall of the King of Aſſyria, is full of perſonified objects; the fir-trees and cedars of Lebanon breaking forth into exultation on the fall of the tyrant; Hell from beneath, ſtirring up all the dead to meet him at his coming; and the dead kings introduced as ſpeaking, and joining in the triumph. In the ſame ſtrain are theſe many lively and paſſionate apoſtrophes to cities and

countries, to perſons and things, with which the Prophetical Writings every where abound. LECT. XLI.

" O thou ſword of the Lord! how long will it
" be, ere thou be quiet? put thyſelf up into
" the ſcabbard, reſt and be ſtill. How can it
" be quiet," (as the reply is inſtantly made,)
" ſeeing the Lord hath given it a charge againſt
" Aſkelon, and the ſea ſhore? there hath he
" appointed it." Jerem. xlvii. 6.

In general, for it would carry us too far to enlarge upon all the inſtances, the Style of the Poetical Books of the Old Teſtament is, beyond the Style of all other Poetical Works, fervid, bold, and animated. It is extremely different from that regular correct expreſſion, to which our ears are accuſtomed in Modern Poetry. It is the burſt of inſpiration. The ſcenes are not coolly deſcribed, but repreſented as paſſing before our eyes. Every object, and every perſon, is addreſſed and ſpoken to, as if preſent; the tranſition is often abrupt; the connection often obſcure; the perſons are often changed; figures crowded and heaped upon one another. Bold ſublimity, not correct elegance, is its character. We ſee the ſpirit of the Writer raiſed beyond himſelf, and labouring to find vent for ideas too mighty for his utterance.

After theſe remarks on the Poetry of the Scripture in general, I ſhall conclude this Diſſertation, with a ſhort account of the different kinds of Poetical Compoſition in the Sacred Books;

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THE ſeveral kinds of Poetical Compoſition which we find in Scripture, are chiefly the Didactic, Elegiac, Paſtoral, and Lyric. Of the Didactic ſpecies of Poetry, the Book of Proverbs is the principal inſtance. The nine firſt Chapters of that Book are highly poetical, adorned with many diſtinguiſhed graces, and figures of expreſſion. At the 10th Chapter, the Style is ſenſibly altered, and deſcends into a lower ſtrain, which is continued to the end; retaining however that ſententious, pointed manner, and that artful conſtruction of period, which diſtinguiſh all the Hebrew Poetry. The Book of Eccleſiaſtes comes likewiſe under this head; and ſome of the Pſalms, as the 119th in particular.

OF Elegiac Poetry, many very beautiful ſpecimens occur in Scripture; ſuch as the Lamentation of David over his friend Jonathan; ſeveral paſſages in the Prophetical Books; and ſeveral of David's Pſalms, compoſed on occaſions of diſtreſs and mourning. The 42d Pſalm in particular, is, in the higheſt degree, tender and plaintive. But the moſt regular and perfect Elegiac Compoſition in the Scripture, perhaps in the whole world, is the Book, entitled the Lamentions of Jeremiah. As the Prophet mourns in that book over the deſtruction of the Temple, and the Holy City, and the overthrow of the whole State, he aſſembles all the affecting

affecting images which a ſubject ſo melancholy could ſuggeſt. The Compoſition is uncommonly artificial. By turns, the Prophet, and the city Jeruſalem, are introduced, as pouring forth their ſorrows; and in the end, a chorus of the people ſend up the moſt earneſt and plaintive ſupplications to God. The lines of the original too, as may, in part, appear from our Tranſlation, are longer than is uſual in the other kinds of Hebrew Poetry; and the melody is rendered thereby more flowing, and better adapted to the querimonious ſtrain of Elegy. LECT. XLI.

THE Song of Solomon affords us a high exemplification of Paſtoral Poetry. Conſidered with reſpect to its ſpiritual meaning, it is undoubtedly a myſtical Allegory; in its form, it is a Dramatic Paſtoral, or a perpetual Dialogue between perſonages in the character of Shepherds; and, ſuitably to that form, it is full of rural and paſtoral images, from beginning to end.

OF Lyric Poetry, or that which is intended to be accompanied with Muſic, the Old Teſtament is full. Beſides a great number of Hymns and Songs, which we find ſcattered in the Hiſtorical and Prophetical Books, ſuch as the Song of Moſes, the Song of Deborah, and many others of like nature, the whole Book of Pſalms is to be conſidered as a collection of Sacred Odes. In theſe, we find the Ode exhibited in all the varieties of its form, and ſupported with the higheſt ſpirit of Lyric Poetry; ſometimes

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ſprightly, cheerful, and triumphant; ſometimes ſolemn and magnificent; ſometimes tender and ſoft. From theſe inſtances, it clearly appears, that there are contained in the Holy Scriptures, full exemplifications of ſeveral of the chief kinds of Poetical Writing.

Among the different Compoſers of the Sacred Books, there is an evident diverſity of ſtyle and manner; and to trace their different characters in this view, will contribute not a little towards our reading their writings with greater advantage. The moſt eminent of the Sacred Poets are, the Author of the Book of Job, David, and Iſaiah. As the Compoſitions of David are of the Lyric kind, there is a greater variety of ſtyle and manner in his works than in thoſe of the other two. The manner in which, conſidered merely as a Poet, David chiefly excels, is the pleaſing, the ſoft, and the tender. In his Pſalms, there are many lofty and ſublime paſſages; but in ſtrength of deſcription, he yields to Job; in ſublimity, he yields to Iſaiah. It is a ſort of temperate grandeur, for which David is chiefly diſtinguiſhed; and to this he always ſoon returns, when, upon ſome occaſions, he riſes above it. The Pſalms in which he touches us moſt, are thoſe in which he deſcribes the happineſs of the righteous, or the goodneſs of God; expreſſes the tender breathing of a devout mind, or ſends up moving and affectionate ſupplications to Heaven. Iſaiah is, without exception, the moſt ſublime of all Poets. This

is

is abundantly viſible in our tranſlation; and, what is a material circumſtance, none of the Books of Scripture appear to have been more happily tranſlated than the Writings of this Prophet. Majeſty is his reigning character; a majeſty more commanding, and more uniformly ſupported, than is to be found among the reſt of the Old Teſtament Poets. He poſſeſſes, indeed, a dignity and grandeur, both in his conceptions and expreſſions, which is altogether unparalleled, and peculiar to himſelf. There is more clearneſs and order too, and a more viſible diſtribution of parts, in his Book, than in any other of the Prophetical Writings.

When we compare him with the reſt of the Poetical Prophets, we immediately ſee, in Jeremiah, a very different genius. Iſaiah employs himſelf generally on magnificent ſubjects. Jeremiah ſeldom diſcovers any diſpoſition to be ſublime, and inclines always to the tender and elegiac. Ezechiel, in poetical grace and elegance, is much inferior to them both; but he is diſtinguiſhed by a character of uncommon force and ardour. To uſe the elegant expreſſions of Biſhop Lowth, with regard to this Prophet: "Eſt atrox, vehemens, tragicus; in ſen-
" ſibus, fervidus, acerbus, indignabundus; in
" imaginibus, fecundus, truculentus, et nonnun-
" quam penè deformis; in dictione grandiloquus,
" gravis, auſterus, et interdum incultus; fre-
" quens in repetitionibus, non decoris aut gra-
" tiæ cauſa, ſed ex indignatione et violentia.

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" Quicquid ſuſceperit tractandum id ſedulò per-
" ſequitur; in eo unicè hæret defixus; a propo-
" ſito raro deflectens. In cæteris, a pleriſque
" vatibus fortaſſe ſuperatus; ſed in eo genere,
" ad quod videtur a natura unice comparatus,
" nimirum, vi, pondere, impetu, granditate, nemo
" unquam eum ſuperavit." The ſame learned Writer compares Iſaiah to Homer, Jeremiah to Simonides, and Ezechiel to Æſchylus. Moſt of the Book of Iſaiah is ſtrictly Poetical; of Jeremiah and Ezechiel, not above one half can be held to belong to Poetry. Among the Minor Prophets, Hoſea, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, and eſpecially Nahum, are diſtinguiſhed for poetical ſpirit. In the Prophecies of Daniel and Jonah, there is no Poetry.

It only now remains to ſpeak of the Book of Job, with which I ſhall conclude. It is known to be extremely antient; generally reputed the moſt antient of all the Poetical Books; the Author uncertain. It is remarkable, that this Book has no connection with the affairs, or manners, of the Jews, or Hebrews. The ſcene is laid in the land of Uz, or Idumea, which is a part of Arabia; and the Imagery employed is generally of a different kind from what I before ſhowed to be peculiar to the Hebrew Poets. We meet with no alluſions to the great events of Sacred Hiſtory, to the religious rites of the Jews, to Lebanon or to Carmel, or any of the peculiarities of the climate of Judæa. We find few compariſons founded on rivers or torrents; theſe

theſe were not familiar objects in Arabia. But the longeſt compariſon that occurs in the Book, is to an object frequent and well known in that region, a brook that fails in the ſeaſon of heat, and diſappoints the expectation of the traveller.

THE Poetry, however, of the Book of Job is not only equal to that of any other of the Sacred Writings, but is ſuperior to them all, except thoſe of Iſaiah alone. As Iſaiah is the moſt ſublime, David the moſt pleaſing and tender, ſo Job is the moſt deſcriptive, of all the inſpired Poets. A peculiar glow of fancy, and ſtrength of deſcription, characteriſe the Author. No Writer whatever abounds ſo much in Metaphors. He may be ſaid not to deſcribe but to render viſible, whatever he treats of. A variety of inſtances might be given. Let us remark only thoſe ſtrong and lively colours, with which, in the following paſſages, taken from the 18th and 20th Chapters of his Book, he paints the condition of the wicked; obſerve how rapidly his figures riſe before us; and what a deep impreſſion, at the ſame time, they leave on the imagination. "Knoweſt thou not this of old, "ſince man was placed upon the earth, that "the triumphing of the wicked is ſhort, and "the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? "Though his excellency mount up to the "heavens, and his head reach the clouds, yet "he ſhall periſh for ever. He ſhall fly away "as a dream, and ſhall not be found; yea, he "ſhall be chaſed away as a viſion of the night.

"The

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" The eye alſo which ſaw him, ſhall ſee him no
" more; they which have ſeen him ſhall ſay,
" where is he? He ſhall ſuck the poiſon of aſps;
" the viper's tongue ſhall ſlay him. In the
" fulneſs of his ſufficiency, he ſhall be in ſtraits;
" every hand ſhall come upon him. He ſhall
" flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of
" ſteel ſhall ſtrike him through. All darkneſs
" ſhall be hid in his ſecret places. A fire not
" blown ſhall conſume him. The Heaven ſhall
" reveal his iniquity, and the earth ſhall riſe up
" againſt him. The increaſe of his houſe ſhall
" depart. His goods ſhall flow away in the
" day of wrath. The light of the wicked ſhall
" be put out; the light ſhall be dark in his
" tabernacle. The ſteps of his ſtrength ſhall
" be ſtraitened, and his own counſel ſhall caſt
" him down. For he is caſt into a net by his
" own feet. He walketh upon a ſnare. Ter-
" rors ſhall make him afraid on every ſide; and
" the robber ſhall prevail againſt him. Brim-
" ſtone ſhall be ſcattered upon his habitation.
" His remembrance ſhall periſh from the earth,
" and he ſhall have no name in the ſtreet.
" He ſhall be driven from light into darkneſs.
" They that come after him ſhall be aſtoniſhed
" at his day. He ſhall drink of the wrath of
" the Almighty."

LECTURE XLII.

EPIC POETRY.

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IT now remains to treat of the two higheſt kinds of Poetical Writing, the Epic and the Dramatic. I begin with the Epic. This Lecture ſhall be employed upon the general principles of that ſpecies of Compoſition: after which, I ſhall take a view of the character and genius of the moſt celebrated Epic Poets.

THE Epic Poem is univerſally allowed to be, of all poetical works, the moſt dignified, and, at the ſame time, the moſt difficult in execution. To contrive a ſtory which ſhall pleaſe and intereſt all Readers, by being at once entertaining, important, and inſtructive; to fill it with ſuitable incidents; to enliven it with a variety of characters, and of deſcriptions; and, throughout a long work, to maintain that propriety of ſentiment, and that elevation of Style, which the Epic Character requires, is unqueſtionably the higheſt effort of Poetical Genius. Hence ſo very

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very few have ſucceeded in the attempt, that ſtrict Critics will hardly allow any other Poems to bear the name of Epic, except the Iliad and the Æneid.

THERE is no ſubject, it muſt be confeſſed, on which Critics have diſplayed more pedantry, than on this. By tedious Diſquiſitions, founded on a ſervile ſubmiſſion to authority, they have given ſuch an air of myſtery to a plain ſubject, as to render it difficult for an ordinary Reader to conceive what an Epic Poem is. By Boſſu's definition, it is a Diſcourſe invented by art, purely to form the manners of men, by means of inſtructions diſguiſed under the allegory of ſome important action, which is related in Verſe. This definition would ſuit ſeveral of Æſop's Fables, if they were ſomewhat extended, and put into Verſe; and, accordingly, to illuſtrate his definition, the Critic draws a parallel, in form, between the conſtruction of one of Æſop's Fables, and the plan of Homer's Iliad. The firſt thing, ſays he, which either a Writer of Fables, or of Heroic Poems, does, is to chooſe ſome maxim or point of morality; to inculcate which, is to be the deſign of his work. Next, he invents a general ſtory, or a ſeries of facts, without any names, ſuch as he judges will be moſt proper for illuſtrating his intended moral. Laſtly, he particulariſes his ſtory; that is, if he be a Fabuliſt, he introduces his dog, his ſheep, and his wolf; or if he be an Epic Poet, he looks out in Antient Hiſtory for ſome proper names of heroes

to give to his actors; and then his plan is completed. LECT. XLII.

This is one of the moſt frigid and abſurd ideas that ever entered into the mind of a Critic. Homer, he ſays, ſaw the Grecians divided into a great number of independent States; but very often obliged to unite into one body againſt their common enemies. The moſt uſeful inſtruction which he could give them in this ſituation, was, that a miſunderſtanding between princes is the ruin of the common cauſe. In order to enforce this inſtruction, he contrived, in his own mind, ſuch a general ſtory as this. Several princes join in a confederacy againſt their enemy. The prince, who was choſen as the leader of the reſt, affronts one of the moſt valiant of the confederates, who thereupon withdraws himſelf, and refuſes to take part in the common enterprize. Great misfortunes are the conſequence of this diviſion; till, at length, both parties having ſuffered by the quarrel, the offended prince forgets his diſpleaſure, and is reconciled to the leader; and union being once reſtored, there enſues complete victory over their enemies. Upon this general plan of his Fable, adds Boſſu, it was of no great conſequence, whether, in filling it up, Homer had employed the names of beaſts, like Æſop, or of men. He would have been equally inſtructive either way. But as he rather fancied to write of heroes, he pitched upon the wall of Troy for the ſcene of his Fable; he feigned ſuch an action to happen there;

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there; he gave the name of Agamemnon to the common leader; that of Achilles, to the offended Prince; and ſo the Iliad aroſe.

He that can believe Homer to have proceeded in this manner, may believe any thing. One may pronounce, with great certainty, that an Author who ſhould compoſe according to ſuch a plan; who ſhould arrange all the ſubject, in his own mind, with a view to the moral, before he had ever thought of the perſonages who were to be the Actors, might write, perhaps, uſeful Fables for children; but as to an Epic Poem, if he adventured to think of one, it would be ſuch as would find few Readers. No perſon of any taſte can entertain a doubt, that the firſt objects which ſtrike an Epic Poet are, the Hero whom he is to celebrate, and the Action, or Story, which is to be the ground-work of his Poem. He does not ſit down, like a Philoſopher, to form the plan of a Treatiſe of Morality. His genius is fired by ſome great enterpriſe, which, to him, appears noble and intereſting; and which, therefore, he pitches upon as worthy of being celebrated in the higheſt ſtrain of Poetry. There is no ſubject of this kind, but will always afford ſome general moral inſtruction, ariſing from it naturally. The inſtruction which Boſſu points out, is certainly ſuggeſted by the Iliad; and there is another which ariſes as naturally, and may juſt as well be aſſigned for the moral of that Poem; namely, that Providence avenges thoſe who have ſuffered injuſtice; but

that

that when they allow their reſentment to carry them too far, it brings misfortunes on themſelves. The ſubject of the Poem is the wrath of Achilles, cauſed by the injuſtice of Agamemnon. Jupiter avenges Achilles, by giving ſucceſs to the Trojans againſt Agamemnon; but by continuing obſtinate in his reſentment, Achilles loſes his beloved friend Patroclus.

The plain account of the nature of an Epic Poem is, the recital of ſome illuſtrious enterpriſe in a Poetical Form. This is as exact a definition as there is any occaſion for on this ſubject. It comprehends ſeveral other Poems beſides the Iliad of Homer, the Æneid of Virgil, and the Jeruſalem of Taſſo; which are, perhaps, the three moſt regular and complete Epic Works that ever were compoſed. But to exclude all Poems from the Epic Claſs, which are not formed exactly upon the ſame model as theſe, is the pedantry of Criticiſm. We can give exact definitions and deſcriptions of minerals, plants, and animals; and can arrange them with preciſion, under the different claſſes to which they belong, becauſe Nature affords a viſible unvarying ſtandard, to which we refer them. But with regard to works of taſte and imagination, where Nature has fixed no ſtandard, but leaves ſcope for beauties of many different kinds, it is abſurd to attempt defining, and limiting them, with the ſame preciſion. Criticiſm, when employed in ſuch attempts, degenerates into trifling queſtions about words and names only.

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only. I therefore have no ſcruple to claſs ſuch Poems, as Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, Lucan's Pharſalia, Statius's Thebaid, Oſſian's Fingal and Temora, Camoens' Luſiad, Voltaire's Henriade, Cambray's Telemachus, Glover's Leonidas, Wilkie's Epigoniad, under the ſame ſpecies of Compoſition with the Iliad and the Æneid; though ſome of them approach much nearer than others to the perfection of theſe celebrated Works. They are, undoubtedly, all Epic; that is, poetical recitals of great adventures; which is all that is meant by this denomination of Poetry.

Though I cannot, by any means, allow, that it is the eſſence of an Epic Poem to be wholly an Allegory, or a Fable contrived to illuſtrate ſome moral truth, yet it is certain that no Poetry is of a more moral nature than this. Its effect in promoting virtue, is not to be meaſured by any one maxim, or inſtruction, which reſults from the whole hiſtory, like the moral of one of Æſop's Fables. This is a poor and trivial view of the advantage to be derived from peruſing a long Epic Work, that, at the end, we ſhall be able to gather from it ſome common-place morality. Its effect ariſes from the impreſſion which the parts of the Poem ſeparately, as well as the whole taken together, make upon the mind of the Reader: from the great examples which it ſets before us, and the high ſentiments with which it warms our hearts. The end which it propoſes, is to extend our ideas of human

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human perfection: or in other words to excite admiration. Now this can be accompliſhed only by proper repreſentations of heroic deeds, and virtuous characters. For high virtue is the object, which all mankind are formed to admire; and, therefore, Epic Poems are, and muſt be, favourable to the cauſe of virtue. Valour, Truth, Juſtice, Fidelity, Friendſhip, Piety, Magnanimity, are the objects which, in the courſe of ſuch Compoſitions, are preſented to our minds, under the moſt ſplendid and honourable colours. In behalf of virtuous perſonages, our affections are engaged; in their deſigns, and their diſtreſſes, we are intereſted; the generous and public affections are awakened; the mind is purified from ſenſual and mean purſuits, and accuſtomed to take part in great, heroic enterpriſes. It is, indeed, no ſmall teſtimony in honour of virtue, that ſeveral of the moſt refined and elegant entertainments of mankind, ſuch as that ſpecies of Poetical Compoſition which we now conſider, muſt be grounded on moral ſentiments and impreſſions. This is a teſtimony of ſuch weight, that, were it in the power of ſceptical Philoſophers, to weaken the force of thoſe reaſonings which eſtabliſh the eſſential diſtinctions between Vice and Virtue, the writings of Epic Poets alone were ſufficient to refute their falſe Philoſophy; ſhewing by that appeal which they conſtantly make to the feelings of mankind in favour of virtue, that the foundations of it are laid deep and ſtrong in human nature.

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THE general ſtrain and ſpirit of Epic Compoſition, ſufficiently mark its diſtinction from the other kinds of Poetry. In Paſtoral Writing, the reigning idea is innocence and tranquillity. Compaſſion is the great object of Tragedy; Ridicule, the province of Comedy. The predominant character of the Epic is, admiration excited by heroic actions. It is ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed from Hiſtory, both by its poetical form, and the liberty of fiction which it aſſumes. It is a more calm compoſition than Tragedy. It admits, nay requires, the pathetic and the violent, on particular occaſions; but the pathetic is not expected to be its general character. It requires, more than any other ſpecies of Poetry, a grave, equal, and ſupported dignity. It takes in a greater compaſs of time and action, than Dramatic Writing admits; and thereby allows a more full diſplay of characters. Dramatic Writings diſplay characters chiefly by means of ſentiments and paſſions; Epic Poetry, chiefly by means of actions. The emotions, therefore, which it raiſes, are not ſo violent, but they are more prolonged. Theſe are the general characteriſtics of this ſpecies of Compoſition. But, in order to give a more particular and critical view of it, let us conſider the Epic Poem under three heads; firſt, with reſpect to the Subject, or Action; ſecondly, with reſpect to the Actors, or Characters; and laſtly, with reſpect to the Narration of the Poet.

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THE action, or ſubject of the Epic Poem, muſt have three properties: it muſt be one; it muſt be great; it muſt be intereſting.

FIRST, it muſt be one Action, or Enterpriſe, which the Poet chooſes for his ſubject. I have frequently had occaſion to remark the importance of unity, in many kinds of Compoſition, in order to make a full and ſtrong impreſſion upon the mind. With the higheſt reaſon, Ariſtotle inſiſts upon this, as eſſential to Epic Poetry; and it is, indeed, the moſt material of all his rules reſpecting it. For it is certain, that, in the rēcital of heroic adventures, ſeveral ſcattered and independent facts can never affect a reader ſo deeply, nor engage his attention ſo ſtrongly, as a tale that is one and connected, where the ſeveral incidents hang upon one another, and are all made to conſpire for the accompliſhment of one end. In a regular Epic, the more ſenſible this unity is rendered to the imagination, the better will be the effect; and for this reaſon, as Ariſtotle has obſerved, it is not ſufficient for the Poet to confine himſelf to the Actions of one man, or to thoſe which happened during a certain period of time; but the unity muſt lie in the ſubject itſelf, and ariſe from all the parts combining into one whole.

IN all the great Epic Poems, unity of action is ſufficiently apparent. Virgil, for inſtance, has choſen for his ſubject, the eſtabliſhment of Æneas in Italy. From the beginning to the end of the

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Poem, this object is ever in our view, and links all the parts of it together with full connection. The unity of the Odyſſey is of the ſame nature; the return and re-eſtabliſhment of Ulyſſes in his own country. The ſubject of Taſſo, is the recovery of Jeruſalem from the Infidels; that of Milton, the expulſion of our firſt parents from Paradiſe; and both of them are unexceptionable in the unity of the Story. The profeſſed ſubject of the Iliad, is the Anger of Achilles, with the conſequences which it produced. The Greeks carry on many unſucceſsful engagements againſt the Trojans, as long as they are deprived of the aſſiſtance of Achilles. Upon his being appeaſed and reconciled to Agamemnon, victory follows, and the Poem cloſes. It muſt be owned, however, that the Unity, or connecting principle, is not quite ſo ſenſible to the imagination here as in the Æneid. For, throughout many books of the Iliad, Achilles is out of ſight; he is loſt in inaction; and the fancy terminates on no other object, than the ſucceſs of the two armies whom we ſee contending in war.

The unity of the Epic Action is not to be ſo ſtrictly interpreted, as if it excluded all Epiſodes, or ſubordinate actions. It is neceſſary to obſerve here, that the term Epiſode is employed by Ariſtotle in a different ſenſe from what we now give to it. It was a term originally applied to Dramatic Poetry, and thence transferred to Epic; and by Epiſodes, in an Epic Poem, it ſhould ſeem

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ſeem that Ariſtotle underſtood the extenſion of the general Fable, or plan of the Poem, into all its circumſtances. What his meaning was, is, indeed, not very clear; and this obſcurity has occaſioned much altercation among Critical Writers. Boſſu, in particular, is ſo perplexed upon this ſubject, as to be almoſt unintelligible. But, diſmiſſing ſo fruitleſs a controverſy, what we now underſtand by Epiſodes, are certain actions, or incidents, introduced into the narration, connected with the principal action, yet not of ſuch importance as to deſtroy, if they had been omitted, the main ſubject of the Poem. Of this nature are the interview of Hector with Andromache, in the Iliad; the ſtory of Cacus, and that of Niſus and Euryalus, in the Æneid; the adventures of Tancred with Erminia and Clorinda, in the Jeruſalem; and the proſpect of his deſcendants exhibited to Adam, in the laſt books of Paradiſe Loſt.

Such Epiſodes as theſe, are not only permitted to an Epic Poet; but, provided they be properly executed, are great ornaments to his work. The rules regarding them are the following:

First, They muſt be naturally introduced; they muſt have a ſufficient connection with the ſubject of the Poem; they muſt ſeem inferior parts that belong to it; not mere appendages ſtuck to it. The Epiſode of Olinda and Sophronia, in the ſecond book of Taſſo's Jeruſalem, is faulty, by tranſgreſſing this rule. It is too

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much detached from the reſt of the work; and being introduced ſo near the opening of the Poem, miſleads the Reader into an expectation, that it is to be of ſome future conſequence; whereas it proves to be connected with nothing that follows. In proportion as any Epiſode is ſlightly related to the main ſubject, it ſhould always be the ſhorter. The paſſion of Dido in the Æneid, and the ſnares of Armida in the Jeruſalem, which are expanded ſo fully in theſe Poems, cannot with propriety be called Epiſodes. They are conſtituent parts of the work, and form a conſiderable ſhare of the intrigue of the Poem.

In the next place, Epiſodes ought to preſent to us, objects of a different kind, from thoſe which go before, and thoſe which follow, in the courſe of the Poem. For it is principally for the ſake of variety, that Epiſodes are introduced into an Epic Compoſition. In ſo long a work, they tend to diverſify the ſubject, and to relieve the Reader, by ſhifting the ſcene. In the midſt of combats, therefore, an Epiſode of the martial kind would be out of place; whereas, Hector's viſit to Andromache in the Iliad, and Erminia's adventure with the Shepherd in the ſeventh book of the Jeruſalem, afford us a well-judged and pleaſing retreat from camps and battles.

Lastly, As an Epiſode is a profeſſed embelliſhment, it ought to be particularly elegant and well-finiſhed; and, accordingly, it is, for the

moſt part, in pieces of this kind, that poets put forth their ſtrength. The Epiſodes of Teribazus and Ariana, in Leonidas, and of the death of Hercules, in the Epigoniad, are the two greateſt beauties in theſe Poems.

The unity of the Epic Action neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that the action be entire and complete; that is, as Ariſtotle well expreſſes it, that it have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Either by relating the whole, in his own perſon, or by introducing ſome of his Actors to relate what had paſſed before the opening of the Poem, the Author muſt always contrive to give us full information of every thing that belongs to his ſubject; he muſt not leave our curioſity, in any article, ungratified; he muſt bring us preciſely to the accompliſhment of his plan; and then conclude.

The ſecond property of the Epic Action, is, that it be great; that it have ſufficient ſplendour and importance, both to fix our attention, and to juſtify the magnificent apparatus which the Poet beſtows upon it. This is ſo evidently requiſite as not to require illuſtration; and indeed, hardly any who have attempted Epic Poetry, have failed in chooſing ſome ſubject ſufficiently important, either by the nature of the action, or by the fame of the perſonages concerned in it.

It contributes to the grandeur of the Epic Subject, that it be not of a modern date, nor fall

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within any period of hiſtory with which we are intimately acquainted. Both Lucan and Voltaire have, in the choice of their ſubjects, tranſgreſſed this rule, and they have, upon that account, ſucceeded worſe. Antiquity is favourable to thoſe high and auguſt ideas which Epic Poetry is deſigned to raiſe. It tends to aggrandize, in our imagination, both perſons and events; and what is ſtill more material, it allows the Poet the liberty of adorning his ſubject by means of fiction. Whereas, as ſoon as he comes within the verge of real and authenticated hiſtory, this liberty is abridged. He muſt either confine himſelf wholly, as Lucan has done, to ſtrict hiſtorical truth, at the expence of rendering his ſtory jejune; or, if he goes beyond it, like Voltaire in his Henriade, this diſadvantage follows, that, in well-known events, the true and the fictitious parts of the plan do not naturally mingle, and incorporate with each other. Theſe obſervations cannot be applied to Dramatic Writing; where the perſonages are exhibited to us, not ſo much that we may admire, as that we may love or pity them. Such paſſions are much more conſiſtent with the familiar hiſtorical knowledge of the perſons who are to be the objects of them; and even require them to be diſplayed in the light, and with the failings of ordinary men. Modern, and well-known hiſtory, therefore, may furniſh very proper materials for Tragedy. But for Epic Poetry, where heroiſm is the ground-work, and where the object in view is to excite admiration, antient or traditionary

hiſtory is aſſuredly the ſafeſt region. There, the author may lay hold on names, and characters, and events, not wholly unknown, on which to build his Story; while, at the ſame time, by reaſon of the diſtance of the period, or of the remoteneſs of the ſcene, ſufficient licence is left him for fiction and invention. LECT. XLII.

THE third property required in the Epic Poem, is, that it be intereſting. It is not ſufficient for this purpoſe that it be great. For deeds of mere valour, how heroic ſoever, may prove cold and tireſome. Much will depend on the happy choice of ſome ſubject, which ſhall, by its nature, intereſt the Public; as when the Poets ſelects for his Hero, one who is the founder, or the deliverer, or the favourite of his nation; or when he writes of achievements that have been highly celebrated, or have been connected with important conſequences to any public cauſe. Moſt of the great Epic Poems are abundantly fortunate in this reſpect, and muſt have been very intereſting to thoſe ages and countries in which they were compoſed.

BUT the chief circumſtance which renders an Epic Poem intereſting, and which tends to intereſt, not one age or country alone, but all Readers, is the ſkilful conduct of the Author in the management of his ſubject. He muſt ſo contrive his plan, as that it ſhall comprehend many affecting incidents. He muſt not dazzle us perpetually with valiant atchievements; for all

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all Readers tire of conſtant fighting, and battles; but he muſt ſtudy to touch our hearts. He may ſometimes be awful and auguſt; he muſt often be tender and pathetic; he muſt give us gentle and pleaſing ſcenes of love, friendſhip, and affection. The more an Epic Poem abounds with ſituations which awaken the feelings of humanity, the more intereſting it is; and theſe form, always, the favourite paſſages of the work. I know no Epic Poets ſo happy in this reſpect as Virgil and Taſſo.

Much, too, depends on the characters of the Heroes, for rendering the Poem intereſting; that they be ſuch as ſhall ſtrongly attach the Readers, and make them take part in the dangers which the Heroes encounter. Theſe dangers, or obſtacles, form what is called the Nodus, or the Intrigue of the Epic Poem; in the judicious conduct of which conſiſts much of the Poet's art. He muſt rouſe our attention, by a proſpect of the difficulties which ſeem to threaten diſappointment to the enterpriſe of his favourite perſonages; he muſt make theſe difficulties grow and thicken upon us, by degrees; till, after having kept us, for ſome time, in a ſtate of agitation and ſuſpenſe, he paves the way, by a proper preparation of incidents, for the winding up of the plot in a natural and probable manner. It is plain, that every tale which is deſigned to engage attention, muſt be conducted on a plan of this ſort.

A Question

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A QUESTION has been moved, whether the nature of the Epic Poem does not require that it ſhould always end ſucceſsfully? Moſt Critics are inclined to think, that a ſucceſsful iſſue is the moſt proper; and they appear to have reaſon on their ſide. An unhappy concluſion depreſſes the mind, and is oppoſite to the elevating emotions which belong to this ſpecies of Poetry. Terror and compaſſion are the proper ſubjects of Tragedy; but as the Epic Poem is of larger compaſs and extent, it were too much, if, after the difficulties and troubles which commonly abound in the progreſs of the Poem, the Author ſhould bring them all at laſt to an unfortunate iſſue. Accordingly, the general practice of Epic Poets is on the ſide of a proſperous concluſion; not, however, without ſome exceptions. For two Authors of great name, Lucan and Milton, have held a contrary courſe; the one concluding with the ſubverſion of the Roman liberty; the other, with the expulſion of man from Paradiſe.

WITH regard to the time or duration of the Epic Action, no preciſe boundaries can be aſcertained. A conſiderable extent is always allowed to it, as it does not neceſſarily depend on thoſe violent paſſions which can be ſuppoſed to have only a ſhort continuance. The Iliad, which is formed upon the anger of Achilles, has, with propriety, the ſhorteſt duration of any of the great Epic Poems. According to Boſſu, the action laſts no longer than forty-ſeven days. The action of the Odyſſey, computed from the taking

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taking of Troy to the Peace of Ithaca, extends to eight years and a half; and the action of the Æneid, computed in the ſame way, from the taking of Troy to the death of Turnus, includes about ſix years. But if we meaſure the period only of the Poet's own narration, or compute from the time in which the Hero makes his firſt appearance, till the concluſion, the duration of both theſe laſt Poems is brought within a much ſmaller compaſs. The Odyſſey, beginning with Ulyſſes in the Iſland of Calypſo, comprehends fifty-eight days only; and the Æneid, beginning with the ſtorm, which throws Æneas upon the coaſt of Africa, is reckoned to include, at the moſt, a year and ſome months.

Having thus treated of the Epic Action, or the Subject of the Poem, I proceed next to make ſome obſervations on the Actors or Perſonages.

As it is the buſineſs of an Epic Poet to copy after nature, and to form a probable intereſting tale, he muſt ſtudy to give all his perſonages proper and well-ſupported characters, ſuch as diſplay the features of human nature. This is what Ariſtotle calls, giving manners to the Poem. It is by no means neceſſary, that all his actors be morally good; imperfect, nay, vicious characters, may find a proper place; though the nature of Epic Poetry ſeems to require, that the principal figures exhibited ſhould be ſuch as tend to raiſe admiration and love, rather than hatred or contempt. But whatever the character be which a Poet

a Poet gives to any of his actors, he muſt take care to preſerve it uniform, and conſiſtent with itſelf. Every thing which that perſon ſays, or does, muſt be ſuited to it, and muſt ſerve to diſtinguiſh him from any other. LECT. XLII.

Poetic characters may be divided into two kinds, general and particular. General characters are, ſuch as wiſe, brave, virtuous, without any farther diſtinction. Particular characters expreſs the ſpecies of bravery, of wiſdom, of virtue, for which any one is eminent. They exhibit the peculiar features which diſtinguiſh one individual from another, which mark the difference of the ſame moral quality in different men, according as it is combined with other diſpoſitions in their temper. In drawing ſuch particular characters, genius is chiefly exerted. How far each of the three great Epic Poets have diſtinguiſhed themſelves in this part of Compoſition, I ſhall have occaſion afterwards to ſhow, when I come to make remarks upon their works. It is ſufficient now to mention, that it is in this part Homer has principally excelled; Taſſo has come the neareſt to Homer; and Virgil has been the moſt deficient.

It has been the practice of all Epic Poets, to ſelect ſome one perſonage, whom they diſtinguiſh above all the reſt, and make the hero of the tale. This is conſidered as eſſential to Epic Compoſition, and is attended with ſeveral advantages. It renders the unity of the ſubject more ſenſible, when

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when there is one principal figure, to which, as to a centre, all the reſt refer. It tends to intereſt us more in the enterpriſe which is carried on; and it gives the Poet an opportunity of exerting his talents for adorning and diſplaying one character, with peculiar ſplendour. It has been aſked, who then is the hero of Paradiſe Loſt? The Devil, it has been anſwered by ſome Critics; and, in conſequence of this idea, much ridicule and cenſure has been thrown upon Milton. But they have miſtaken that Author's intention, by proceeding upon a ſuppoſition, that, in the concluſion of the Poem, the hero muſt needs be triumphant. Whereas Milton followed a different plan, and has given a tragic concluſion to a Poem, otherwiſe Epic in its form. For Adam is undoubtedly his hero; that is, the capital and moſt intereſting figure in his Poem.

Besides human actors, there are perſonages of another kind, that uſually occupy no ſmall place in Epic Poetry; I mean the gods, or ſupernatural beings. This brings us to the conſideration of what is called the Machinery of the Epic Poem; the moſt nice and difficult part of the ſubject. Critics appear to me to have gone to extremes on both ſides. Almoſt all the French Critics decide in favour of Machinery, as eſſential to the conſtitution of an Epic Poem. They quote that ſentence of Petronius Arbiter, as if it were an oracle, "per ambages, Deorumque "miniſteria, precipitandus eſt liber ſpiritus," and

and hold, that though a Poem had every other requiſite that could be demanded, yet it could not be ranked in the Epic claſs, unleſs the main action was carried on by the intervention of the gods. This deciſion ſeems to be founded on no principle or reaſon whatever, unleſs a ſuperſtitious reverence for the practice of Homer and Virgil. Theſe poets very properly embelliſhed their ſtory by the traditional tales and popular legends of their own country; according to which, all the great tranſactions of the heroic times were intermixed with the fables of their deities. But does it thence follow, that in other countries, and other ages, where there is not the like advantage of current ſuperſtition, and popular credulity, Epic Poetry muſt be wholly confined to antiquated fictions, and fairy tales? Lucan has compoſed a very ſpirited Poem, certainly of the Epic kind, where neither gods nor ſupernatural beings are at all employed. The Author of Leonidas has made an attempt of the ſame kind, not without ſucceſs; and beyond doubt, wherever a Poet gives us a regular heroic ſtory, well connected in its parts, adorned with characters, and ſupported with proper dignity and elevation, though his agents be every one of them human, he has fulfilled the chief requiſites of this ſort of Compoſition, and has a juſt title to be claſſed with Epic Writers.

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But though I cannot admit that Machinery is neceſſary or eſſential to the Epic plan, neither can I agree with ſome late Critics of conſiderable

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able name, who are for excluding it totally, as inconſiſtent with that probability and impreſſion of reality, which, they think, ſhould reign in this kind of Writing*. Mankind do not conſider Poetical Writings with ſo philoſophical an eye. They ſeek entertainment from them; and for the bulk of Readers, indeed for almoſt all men, the marvellous has a great charm. It gratifies and fills the imagination; and gives room for many a ſtriking and ſublime deſcription. In Epic Poetry, in particular, where admiration and lofty ideas are ſuppoſed to reign, the marvellous and ſupernatural find, if any where, their proper place. They both enable the Poet to aggrandize his ſubject, by means of thoſe auguſt and ſolemn objects which religion introduces into it; and they allow him to enlarge and diverſify his plan, by comprehending within it heaven, and earth, and hell, men and inviſible beings, and the whole circle of the Univerſe.

At the ſame time, in the uſe of this ſupernatural Machinery, it becomes a Poet to be temperate and prudent. He is not at liberty to invent what ſyſtem of the marvellous he pleaſes. It muſt always have ſome foundation in popular belief. He muſt avail himſelf in a decent manner, either of the religious faith, or the ſuperſtitious credulity of the country wherein he

* See Elem. of Criticiſm, ch. 22.

lives,

lives, or of which he writes, ſo as to give an air of probability to events which are moſt contrary to the common courſe of Nature. Whatever Machinery he employs, he muſt take care not to overload us with it; not to withdraw human actions and manners too much from view, nor to obſcure them under a cloud of incredible fictions. He muſt always remember that his chief buſineſs is to relate to men, the actions and the exploits of men; that it is by theſe principally he is to intereſt us, and to touch our hearts; and that if probability be altogether baniſhed from his work, it can never make a deep or a laſting impreſſion. Indeed, I know nothing more difficult in Epic Poetry, than to adjuſt properly the mixture of the marvellous with the probable; ſo as to gratify and amuſe us with the one, without ſacrificing the other. I need hardly obſerve, that theſe obſervations affect not the conduct of Milton's work; whoſe plan being altogether theological, his ſupernatural beings form not the machinery, but are the principal actors in the Poem.

With regard to Allegorical Perſonages, Fame, Diſcord, Love, and the like, it may be ſafely pronounced, that they form the worſt machinery of any. In deſcription they are ſometimes allowable, and may ſerve for embelliſhment; but they ſhould never be permitted to bear any ſhare in the action of the Poem. For being plain and declared fictions, mere names of general ideas, to which even fancy cannot at-

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tribute any exiſtenee as perſons, if they are introduced as mingling with human actors, an intolerable confuſion of ſhadows and realities ariſe, and all conſiſteney of action is utterly deſtroyed.

In the narration of the Poet, which is the laſt head that remains to be conſidered, it is not material, whether he relate the whole ſtory in his own character, or introduee ſome of his perſonages to relate any part of the action that had paſſed before the Poem opens. Homer follows the one method in his Iliad, and the other in his Odyſſey. Virgil has, in this reſpect, imitated the conduct of the Odyſſey; Taſſo that of the Iliad. The chief advantage which ariſes from any of the actors being employed to relate part of the ſtory is, that it allows the Poet, if he chooſes it, to open with ſome intereſting ſituation of affairs, informing us afterwards of what had paſſed before that period; and gives him the greater liberty of ſpreading out ſueh parts of the ſubject as he is inclined to dwell upon in perſon, and of eomprehending the reſt within a ſhort recital. Where the ſubject is of great extent, and eomprehends the tranſactions of ſeveral years, as in the Odyſſey and the Æneid, this method therefore ſeems preferable. When the ſubject is of ſmaller eompaſs, and ſhorter duration, as in the Iliad and the Jeruſalem, the Poet may, without diſadvantage, relate the whole in his own perſon.

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In the propoſition of the ſubject, the invocation of the Muſe, and other ceremonies of the Introduction, Poets may vary at their pleaſure. It is perfectly trifling to make theſe little formalities the object of preciſe rule, any farther, than that the ſubject of the work ſhould always be clearly propoſed, and without affected or unſuitable pomp. For, according to Horace's noted rule, no Introduction ſhould ever ſet out too high, or promiſe too much, leſt the Author ſhould not fulfil the expectations he has raiſed.

What is of moſt importance in the tenor of the narration is, that it be perſpicuous, animated, and enriched with all the beauties of Poetry. No ſort of Compoſition requires more ſtrength, dignity, and fire, than the Epic Poem. It is the region within which we look for every thing that is ſublime in deſcription, tender in ſentiment, and bold and lively in expreſſion; and, therefore, though an Author's plan ſhould be faultleſs, and his ſtory ever ſo well conducted, yet if he be feeble, or flat in Style, deſtitute of affecting ſcenes, and deficient in poetical colouring, he can have no ſucceſs. The ornaments which Epic Poetry admits, muſt all be of the grave and chaſte kind. Nothing that is looſe, ludicrous, or affected, finds any place there. All the objects which it preſents ought to be either great, or tender, or pleaſing. Deſcriptions of diſguſting or ſhocking objects ſhould as much as poſſible be avoided;

LECT. XLII. and therefore the fable of the Harpies, in the third book of the Æneid, and the allegory of Sin and Death, in the ſecond book of Paradiſe Loſt, had been better omitted in theſe celebrated Poems.

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HOMER'S ILIAD AND ODYSSEY.—VIRGIL'S ÆNEID.

As the Epic Poem is univerſally allowed to poſſeſs the higheſt rank among Poetical Works, it merits a particular diſcuſſion. Having treated of the nature of this Compoſition, and the principal rules relating to it, I proceed to make ſome obſervations on the moſt diſtinguiſhed Epic Poems, Antient and Modern.

Homer claims, on every account, our firſt attention, as the Father not only of Epic Poetry, but, in ſome meaſure, of Poetry in general. Whoever ſits down to read Homer, muſt conſider that he is going to read the moſt antient book in the world, next to the Bible. Without making this reflection, he cannot enter into the ſpirit, nor reliſh the Compoſition of the author. He is not to look for the correctneſs, and elegance, of the Auguſtan Age. He

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muſt diveſt himſelf of our modern ideas of dignity and refinement, and tranſport his imagination almoſt three thouſand years back in the hiſtory of mankind. What he is to expect is a picture of the antient world. He muſt reckon upon finding characters and manners that retain a conſiderable tincture of the ſavage ſtate; moral ideas, as yet imperfectly formed; and the appetites and paſſions of men brought under none of thoſe reſtraints, to which in a more advanced ſtate of Society, they are accuſtomed; but bodily ſtrength, prized as one of the chief heroic endowments; the preparing of a meal, and the appeaſing of hunger, deſcribed as very intereſting objects; and the heroes boaſting of themſelves openly, ſcolding one another outrageouſly, and glorying, as we ſhould now think very indecently, over their fallen enemies.

The opening of the Iliad poſſeſſes none of that ſort of dignity, which a modern looks for in a great Epic Poem. It turns on no higher ſubject, than the quarrel of two Chieftains about a female ſlave. The Prieſt of Apollo beſeeches Agamemnon to reſtore his daughter, who, in the plunder of a city, had fallen to Agamemnon's ſhare of booty. He refuſes. Apollo, at the prayer of his Prieſt, ſends a plague into the Grecian camp. The Augur, when conſulted, declares, that there is no way of appeaſing Apollo, but by reſtoring the daughter of his Prieſt. Agamemnon is enraged at the Augur; profeſſes that he likes this ſlave better than his wife

wife Clytemneſtra; but ſince he muſt reſtore her, in order to ſave the army, inſiſts to have another in her place; and pitches upon Briſeis, the ſlave of Achilles. Achilles, as was to be expected, kindles into rage at this demand; reproaches him for his rapacity and inſolence, and, after giving him many hard names, ſolemnly ſwears, that, if he is to be thus treated by the General, he will withdraw his troops, and aſſiſt the Grecians no more againſt the Trojans. He withdraws accordingly. His mother, the Goddeſs Thetis, intereſts Jupiter in his cauſe; who, to revenge the wrong which Achilles had ſuffered, takes part againſt the Greeks, and ſuffers them to fall into great and long diſtreſs; until Achilles is pacified, and reconciliation brought about between him and Agamemnon. LECT. XLIII.

Such is the baſis of the whole action of the Iliad. Hence riſe all thoſe "ſpecioſa miracula," as Horace terms them, which fill that extraordinary Poem; and which have had the power of intereſting almoſt all the nations of Europe during every age, ſince the days of Homer. The general admiration commanded by a poetical plan, ſo very different from what any one would have formed in our times, ought not, upon reflection, to be matter of ſurpriſe. For, beſides that a fertile genius can enrich and beautify any ſubject on which it is employed, it is to be obſerved, that antient manners, how much ſoever they contradict our preſent notions of dignity

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and refinement, afford, nevertheleſs, materials for Poetry, ſuperior, in ſome reſpects, to thoſe which are furniſhed by a more poliſhed ſtate of Society. They diſcover human nature more open and undiſguiſed, without any of thoſe ſtudied forms of behaviour which now conceal men from one another. They give free ſcope to the ſtrongeſt and moſt impetuous emotions of the mind, which make a better figure in deſcription, than calm and temperate feelings. They ſhew us our native prejudices, appetites, and deſires, exerting themſelves without controul. From this ſtate of manners, joined with the advantage of that ſtrong and expreſſive Style, which, as I formerly obſerved, commonly diſtinguiſhes the Compoſitions of early ages, we have ground to look for more of the boldneſs, eaſe, and freedom of native genius, in Compoſitions of ſuch a period, than in thoſe of more civilized times. And, accordingly, the two great characters of the Homeric Poetry are, Fire and Simplicity. Let us now proceed to make ſome more particular obſervations on the Iliad, under the three heads of the Subject and Action, the Characters, and Narration of the Poet.

The Subject of the Iliad muſt unqueſtionably be admitted to be, in the main, happily choſen. In the days of Homer, no object could be more ſplendid and dignified than the Trojan war. So great a confederacy of the Grecian States, under one leader; and the ten years ſiege which they

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they carried on againſt Troy, muſt have ſpread far abroad the renown of many military exploits, and intereſted all Greece in the traditions concerning the Heroes who had moſt eminently ſignalized themſelves. Upon theſe traditions, Homer grounded his Poem; and though he lived, as is generally believed, only two or three centuries after the Trojan war, yet, through the want of written records, tradition muſt, by his time, have fallen into the degree of obſcurity moſt proper for Poetry; and have left him at full liberty to mix as much fable as he pleaſed with the remains of true hiſtory. He has not choſen, for his ſubject, the whole Trojan war; but, with great judgment, he has ſelected one part of it, the quarrel betwixt Achilles and Agamemnon, and the events to which that quarrel gave riſe; which, though they take up forty-ſeven days only, yet include the moſt intereſting and moſt critical period of the war. By this management, he has given greater unity to what would have otherwiſe been an unconnected hiſtory of battles. He has gained one Hero, or principal character, Achilles, who reigns throughout the work; and he has ſhewn the pernicious effect of diſcord among confederated princes. At the ſame time, I admit that Homer is leſs fortunate in his ſubject than Virgil. The plan of the Æneid includes a greater compaſs, and a more agreeable diverſity of events; whereas the Iliad is almoſt entirely filled with battles.

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THE praiſe of high invention has in every age been given to Homer, with the greateſt reaſon. The prodigious number of incidents, of ſpeeches, of characters divine and human, with which he abounds; the ſurpriſing variety with which he has diverſified his battles, in the wounds and deaths, and little hiſtory-pieces of almoſt all the perſons ſlain, diſcover an invention next to boundleſs. But the praiſe of judgment is, in my opinion, no leſs due to Homer, than that of invention. His ſtory is all along conducted with great art. He riſes upon us gradually; his Heroes are brought out, one after another, to be objects of our attention. The diſtreſs thickens, as the Poem advances; and every thing is ſo contrived as to aggrandize Achilles, and to render him, as the Poet intended he ſhould be, the capital figure.

BUT that wherein Homer excels all Writers is the characteriſtical part. Here, he is without a rival. His lively and ſpirited exhibition of characters is, in a great meaſure, owing to his being ſo dramatic a Writer, abounding every where with dialogue and converſation. There is much more dialogue in Homer than in Virgil; or, indeed, than in any other Poet. What Virgil informs us of by two words of Narration, Homer brings about by a Speech. We may obſerve here, that this method of writing is more ancient than the narrative manner. Of this we have a clear proof in the books of the Old Teſtament, which, inſtead of Narration, abound with Speeches,

Speeches, with anſwers and replies, upon the moſt familiar ſubjects. Thus, in the Book of Geneſis: "Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, "whence come ye? and they anſwered, From "the land of Canaan we come to buy food. "And Joſeph ſaid, Ye are ſpies; to ſee the "nakedneſs of the land are ye come. And "they ſaid unto him, Nay, my Lord, but to "buy food are thy ſervants come; we are all "one man's ſons, we are true men, thy ſervants "are no ſpies. And he ſaid unto them, Nay, "but to ſee the nakedneſs of the land ye are "come. And they ſaid, Thy ſervants are "twelve brethren, the ſons of one man in the "land of Canaan; and behold the youngeſt is "this day with our father; and one is not. "And Joſeph ſaid unto them, This it is that I "ſpake unto you, ſaying ye are ſpies. Hereby "ye ſhall be proved; by the life of Pharaoh, ye "ſhall not go forth, except your youngeſt bro-"ther come hither," &c. Geneſis, xlii. 7—15. Such a Style as this, is the moſt ſimple and artleſs form of Writing, and muſt therefore, undoubtedly, have been the moſt antient. It is copying directly from nature; giving a plain rehearſal of what paſſed, or was ſuppoſed to paſs, in converſation between the perſons of whom the Author treats. In progreſs of time, when the Art of Writing was more ſtudied, it was thought more elegant to compreſs the ſubſtance of converſation into ſhort diſtinct narrative, made by the Poet or Hiſtorian in his own perſon; and to reſerve direct ſpeeches for ſolemn occaſions only.

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THE Antient Dramatic method which Homer practiſed has ſome advantages, balanced with ſome defects. It renders Compoſition more natural and animated, and more expreſſive of manners and characters; but withal leſs grave and majeſtic, and ſometimes tireſome. Homer, it muſt be admitted, has carried his propenſity to the making of Speeches too far; and if he be tedious any where, it is in theſe; ſome of them trifling, and ſome of them plainly unſeaſonable. Together with the Greek vivacity, he leaves upon our minds ſome impreſſion of the Greek loquacity alſo. His Speeches, however, are upon the whole characteriſtic and lively; and to them we owe, in a great meaſure, that admirable diſplay which he has given of human nature. Every one who reads him, becomes familiarly and intimately acquainted with his Heroes. We ſeem to have lived among them, and to have converſed with them. Not only has he purſued the ſingle virtue of courage, through all its different forms and features, in his different warriors; but ſome more delicate characters, into which courage either enters not at all, or but for an inconſiderable part, he has drawn with ſingular art.

How finely, for inſtance, has he painted the character of Helen, ſo as, notwithſtanding her frailty and her crimes, to prevent her from being an odious object! The admiration with which the old generals behold her, in the Third Book, when ſhe is coming towards them, preſents

ſents her to us with much dignity. Her veiling herſelf, and ſhedding tears, her confuſion in the preſence of Priam, her grief and ſelf-accuſations at the ſight of Menelaus, her upbraiding Paris for his cowardice, and, at the ſame time, her returning fondneſs for him, exhibit the moſt ſtriking features of that mixed female character, which we partly condemn, and partly pity. Homer never introduces her, without making her ſay ſomething to move our compaſſion; while, at the ſame time, he takes care to contraſt her character with that of a virtuous matron, in the chaſte and tender Andromache.

Paris himſelf, the author of all the miſchief, is characteriſed with the utmoſt propriety. He is, as we ſhould expect him, a mixture of gallantry and effeminacy. He retreats from Menelaus, on his firſt appearance; but, immediately afterwards, enters into ſingle combat with him. He is a great maſter of civility, remarkably courteous in his ſpeeches; and receives all the reproofs of his brother Hector with modeſty and deference. He is deſcribed as a perſon of elegance and taſte. He was the Architect of his own Palace. He is, in the Sixth Book, found by Hector, burniſhing and dreſſing up his armour; and iſſues forth to battle with a peculiar gaiety and oſtentation of appearance, which is illuſtrated by one of the fineſt compariſons in all the Iliad, that of the horſe prancing to the river.

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HOMER has been blamed for making his hero Achilles of too brutal and inamiable a character. But I am inclined to think, that injuſtice is commonly done to Achilles, upon the credit of two lines of Horace, who has certainly overloaded his character:

> Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
> Jura negat ſibi nata; nihil non arrogat armis.

ACHILLES is paſſionate, indeed, to a great degree; but he is far from being a contemner of laws and juſtice. In the conteſt with Agamemnon, though he carries it on with too much heat, yet he has reaſon on his ſide. He was notoriouſly wronged; but he ſubmits; and reſigns Briſeis peaceably, when the heralds come to demand her; only, he will fight no longer under the command of a leader who had affronted him. Beſides his wonderful bravery and contempt of death, he has ſeveral other qualities of a Hero. He is open and ſincere. He loves his ſubjects, and reſpects the Gods. He is diſtinguiſhed by ſtrong friendſhips and attachments; he is, throughout, high-ſpirited, gallant, and honourable; and allowing for a degree of ferocity which belonged to the times, and enters into the characters of moſt of Homer's Heroes, he is, upon the whole, abundantly fitted to raiſe high admiration, though not pure eſteem.

UNDER the head of Characters, Homer's Gods, or his Machinery, according to the critical

tical term, come under conſideration. The Gods make a great figure in the Iliad; much greater indeed then they do in the Æneid, or in any other Epic Poem; and hence Homer has become the ſtandard of Poetic Theology. Concerning Machinery in general, I delivered my ſentiments in the former Lecture. Concerning Homer's Machinery, in particular, we muſt obſerve, that it was not his own invention. Like every other good Poet, he unqueſtionably followed the traditions of his country. The age of the Trojan war approached to the age of the Gods, and Demi-gods, in Greece. Several of the Heroes concerned in that war were reputed to be the children of theſe Gods. Of courſe, the traditionary tales relating to them, and to the exploits of that age, were blended with the Fables of the Deities. Theſe popular legends, Homer very properly adopted; though it is perfectly abſurd to infer from this, that therefore Poets ariſing in ſucceeding ages, and writing on quite different ſubjects, are obliged to follow the ſame ſyſtem of Machinery.

In the hands of Homer, it produces, on the whole, a noble effect; it is always gay and amuſing; often, lofty and magnificent. It introduces into his Poem a great number of perſonages, almoſt as much diſtinguiſhed by characters as his human actors. It diverſifies his battles greatly by the intervention of the Gods; and by frequently ſhifting the ſcene from earth to heaven, it gives an agreeable relief to the mind,

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mind, in the midſt of ſo much blood and ſlaughter. Homer's Gods, it muſt be confeſſed, though they be always lively and animated figures, yet ſometimes want dignity. The conjugal contentions between Juno and Jupiter, with which he entertains us, and the indecent ſquabbles he deſcribes among the inferior Deities, according as they take different ſides with the contending parties, would be very improper models for any modern Poet to imitate. In apology for Homer, however, it muſt be remembered, that according to the Fables of thoſe days, the Gods are but one remove above the condition of men. They have all the human paſſions. They drink and feaſt, and are vulnerable like men; they have children and kinſmen, in the oppoſite armies; and except that they are immortal, that they have houſes on the top of Olympus, and winged chariots, in which they are often flying down to earth, and then re-aſcending, in order to feaſt on nectar and ambroſia; they are in truth no higher beings than the human Heroes, and therefore very fit to take part in their contentions. At the ſame time, though Homer ſo frequently degrades his divinities, yet he knows how to make them appear, in ſome conjunctures, with the moſt awful majeſty. Jupiter, the Father of Gods and Men, is, for the moſt part, introduced with great dignity; and ſeveral of the moſt ſublime conceptions in the Iliad are founded on the appearances of Neptune, Minerva, and Apollo, on great occaſions.

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With regard to Homer's Style and manner of Writing, it is eaſy, natural, and in the higheſt degree animated. It will be admired by ſuch only as reliſh antient ſimplicity, and can make allowance for certain negligences and repetitions, which greater refinement in the Art of Writing has taught ſucceeding, though far inferior, Poets to avoid. For Homer is the moſt ſimple in his Style of all the great Poets, and reſembles moſt the Style of the poetical parts of the Old Teſtament. They can have no conception of his manner, who are acquainted with him in Mr. Pope's Tranſlation only. An excellēnt poetical performance that Tranſlation is, and faithful in the main to the Original. In ſome places, it may be thought to have even improved Homer. It has certainly ſoftened ſome of his rudeneſſes, and added delicacy and grace to ſome of his ſentiments. But withal, it is no other than Homer moderniſed. In the midſt of the elegance and luxuriancy of Mr. Pope's language, we loſe ſight of the old Bard's ſimplicity. I know indeed no Author, to whom it is more difficult to do juſtice in a Tranſlation, than Homer. As the plainneſs of his diction, were it literally rendered, would often appear flat in any modern language; ſo, in the midſt of that plainneſs, and not a little heightened by it, there are every where breaking forth upon us flaſhes of native fire, of ſublimity and beauty, which hardly any language, except his own, could preſerve. His Verſification has been univerſally acknowledged to be uncommonly

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melodious, and to carry, beyond that of any Poet, a reſemblance in the ſound to the ſenſe and meaning.

In Narration, Homer is, at all times, remarkably conciſe, which renders him lively and agreeable; though in his ſpeeches, as I have before admitted, ſometimes tedious. He is every where deſcriptive; and deſcriptive by means of thoſe well-choſen particulars, which form the excellency of deſcription. Virgil gives us the nod of Jupiter with great magnificence:

Annuit; et totum nutu tremefecit Olympum.

But Homer, in deſcribing the ſame thing, gives us the ſable eye-brows of Jupiter bent, and his ambroſial curls ſhaken, at the moment when he gives the nod; and thereby renders the figure more natural and lively. Whenever he ſeeks to draw our attention to ſome intereſting object, he particulariſes it ſo happily, as to paint it in a manner to our ſight. The ſhot of Pandarus' arrow, which broke the truce between the two armies, as related in the Fourth Book, may be given for an inſtance; and above all the admirable interview of Hector with Andromache, in the Sixth Book; where all the circumſtances of conjugal and parental tenderneſs, the child affrighted with the view of his Father's Helmet and Creſt, and clinging to the nurſe; Hector putting off his Helmet, taking the child into his arms, and offering up a prayer for him

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to the Gods; Andromache receiving back the child with a ſmile of pleaſure, and, at the ſame inſtant, burſting into tears, δακρυσεν γελασασα, as it is finely expreſſed in the original, form the moſt natural and affecting picture that can poſſibly be imagined.

In the deſcription of Battles, Homer particularly excels. He works up the hurry, the terror, and confuſion of them in ſo maſterly a manner, as to place the Reader in the very midſt of the engagement. It is here, that the fire of his genius is moſt highly diſplayed; inſomuch, that Virgil's Battles, and indeed thoſe of moſt other Poets, are cold and inanimated in compariſon of Homer's.

With regard to Similies, no Poet abounds ſo much with them. Several of them are beyond doubt extremely beautiful: ſuch as thoſe of the fires in the Trojan camp compared to the Moon and Stars by night; Paris going forth to Battle, to the war-horſe prancing to the river; and Euphorbus ſlain, to the flowering ſhrub cut down by a ſudden blaſt: all which are among the fineſt poetical paſſages that are any where to be found. I am not, however, of opinion that Homer's Compariſons, taken in general, are his greateſt beauties. They come too thick upon us; and often interrupt the train of his narration or deſcription. The reſemblance on which they are founded, is ſometimes not clear; and the objects whence they are taken, are too

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uniform. His Lions, Bulls, Eagles, and herds of Sheep, recur too frequently; and the alluſions in ſome of his Similies, even after the allowances that are to be made for antient manners, muſt be admitted to be debaſing *.

My obſervations, hitherto, have been made upon the Iliad only. It is neceſſary to take ſome notice of the Odyſſey alſo. Longinus's criticiſm upon it is not without foundation, that

* The ſevereſt eritic upon Homer in modern times, M. la Motte, admits all that his admirers urge for the ſuperiority of his genius and talents as a Poet: "C'étoit un génie naturelle-" ment Poëtique, ami des Fables & des merveilleux, et porté " en général à l'imitation, ſoit des objets de la nature, ſoit " des ſentimens et des actions des hommes. Il avoit l'eſprit " vaſte et féeond: plus elevé que délicat, plus naturel qu'inge-" nieux, et plus amoureux de l'abondance que du ehoix.—Il a " faiſi, par une ſupériorité de gout, les prémieres idées de " l'éloquenee dans toutes les genres; il a parlé la langage des " toutes les paſſions; et il a du moins ouvert aux écrivains qui " doivente le ſuivre une infinité de routes, qu'il ne reſtoit plus " qu'à applanir. Il y a apparence que en quelques temps qu' " Homère eût veçu, il eût été, du moins, le plus grand Poëte " de ſon païs: et a ne le prendre que dans ce ſens, on peut " dire, qu'il eſt le maître de ceux mêmes qui l'ont ſurpaſſe."—Diſcours ſur Homère. Oeuvres de la Motte, Tome 2de. After theſe high praiſes of the Author, he indeed endeavours to bring the merit of the Iliad very low. But his principal objections turn on the debaſing ideas which are there given of the Gods, the groſs characters and manners of the Heroes, and the imperfect morality of the ſentiments; which, as Voltaire obſerves, is like aecuſing a painter for having drawn his figures in the dreſs of the times. Homer painted his Gods, ſueh as popular tradition then repreſented them; and deſeribed ſueh characters and ſentiments, as he found among thoſe with whom he lived.

Homer

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Homer may in this Poem be compared to the ſetting ſun, whoſe grandeur ſtill remains without the heat of his meridian beams. It wants the vigour and ſublimity of the Iliad; yet, at the ſame time, poſſeſſes ſo many beauties, as to be juſtly entitled to high praiſe. It is a very amuſing Poem, and has much greater variety than the Iliad; it contains many intereſting ſtories, and beautiful deſcriptions. We ſee every where the ſame deſcriptive and dramatic genius, and the ſame fertility of invention that appears in the other work. It deſcends indeed from the dignity of Gods, and Heroes, and warlike atchievements; but in recompence, we have more pleaſing pictures of antient manners. Inſtead of that ferocity which reigns in the Iliad, the Odyſſey preſents us with the moſt amiable images of hoſpitality and humanity; entertains us with many a wonderful adventure, and many a landſcape of nature; and inſtructs us by a conſtant vein of morality and virtue, which runs through the Poem.

At the ſame time, there are ſome defects which muſt be acknowledged in the Odyſſey. Many ſcenes in it fall below the majeſty which we naturally expect in an Epic Poem. The laſt Twelve Books, after Ulyſſes is landed in Ithaca, are, in ſeveral parts, tedious and languid; and though the diſcovery, which Ulyſſes makes of himſelf to his Nurſe Euryclea, and his interview with Penelope before ſhe knows him, in the Nineteenth Book, are tender and

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affecting, yet the Poet does not ſeem happy in the great anagnoriſis, or the diſcovery of Ulyſſes to Penelope. She is too cautious and diſtruſtful, and we are diſappointed of the ſurpriſe of joy, which we expected on that high occaſion.

After having ſaid ſo much of the Father of Epic Poetry, it is now time to proceed to Virgil, who has a character clearly marked, and quite diſtinct from that of Homer. As the diſtinguiſhing excellencies of the Iliad are, Simplicity and Fire; thoſe of the Æneid are, Elegance and Tenderneſs. Virgil is, beyond doubt, leſs animated and leſs ſublime than Homer; but to counterbalance this, he has fewer negligences, greater variety, and ſupports more of a correct and regular dignity throughout his work.

When we begin to read the Iliad, we find ourſelves in the region of the moſt remote, and even unrefined antiquity. When we open the Æneid, we diſcover all the correctneſs, and the improvements, of the Auguſtan age. We meet with no contentions of heroes about a female ſlave; no violent ſcolding, nor abuſive language, but the Poem opens with the utmoſt magnificence; with Juno, forming deſigns for preventing Æneas's eſtabliſhment in Italy, and Æneas himſelf preſented to us with all his fleet in the middle of a ſtorm, which is deſcribed in the higheſt ſtyle of Poetry.

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The ſubject of the Æneid is extremely happy; ſtill more ſo, in my opinion, than either of Homer's Poems. As nothing could be more noble, nor carry more of Epic dignity, ſo nothing could be more flattering and intereſting to the Roman people, than Virgil's deriving the origin of their ſtate from ſo famous a hero as Æneas. The object was ſplendid in itſelf; it gave the Poet a theme, taken from the antient traditionary hiſtory of his own country; it allowed him to connect his ſubject with Homer's ſtories, and to adopt all his mythology; it afforded him the opportunity of frequently glancing at all the future great exploits of the Romans, and of deſcribing Italy, and the very territory of Rome, in its antient and fabulous ſtate. The eſtabliſhment of Æneas conſtantly traverſed by Juno, leads to a great diverſity of events, of voyages, and wars; and furniſhes a proper intermixture of the incidents of peace with martial exploits. Upon the whole, I believe, there is no where to be found ſo complete a model of an Epic Fable, or Story, as Virgil's Æneid. I ſee no foundation for the opinion, entertained by ſome Critics, that the Æneid is to be conſidered as an Allegorical Poem, which carries a conſtant reference to the character and reign of Auguſtus Cæſar; or, that Virgil's main deſign in compoſing the Æneid, was to reconcile the Romans to the government of that Prince, who is ſuppoſed to be ſhadowed out under the character of Æneas. Virgil, indeed, like the other Poets of that age, takes every

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opportunity which his ſubject affords him, of paying court to Auguſtus*. But, to imagine that he carried a political plan in his view, through the whole Poem, appears to me no more than a fanciful refinement. He had ſufficient motives, as a Poet, to determine him to the choice of his ſubject, from its being, in itſelf, both great and pleaſing; from its being ſuited to his genius, and its being attended with the peculiar advantages, which I mentioned above, for the full diſplay of poetical talents.

UNITY of action is perfectly preſerved; as, from beginning to end, one main object is always kept in view, the ſettlement of Æneas in Italy, by the order of the Gods. As the ſtory comprehends the tranſactions of ſeveral years, part of the tranſactions are very properly thrown into a recital made by the Hero. The Epiſodes are linked with ſufficient connection to the main ſubject; and the Nodus, or Intrigue of the Poem, is, according to the plan of antient machinery, happily formed. The wrath of Juno, who oppoſes herſelf to the Trojan ſettlement in Italy, gives riſe to all the difficulties which obſtruct Æneas's undertaking, and connects the human with the celeſtial operations, throughout the whole work. Hence ariſe the tempeſt which throws Æneas upon the ſhore of Africa; the

* As particularly in that noted paſſage of the 6th book, l. 791.

Hic vir, hic eſt, tibi quem promitti ſæpius audis, &c.

paſſion

paſſion of Dido, who endeavours to detain him at Carthage; and the efforts of Turnus, who oppoſes him in war. Till, at laſt, upon a compoſition made with Jupiter, that the Trojan name ſhall be for ever ſunk in the Latin, Juno foregoes her reſentment, and the Hero becomes victorious. LECT. XLIII.

In theſe main points, Virgil has conducted his work with great propriety, and ſhewn his art and judgment. But the admiration due to ſo eminent a Poet, muſt not prevent us from remarking ſome other particulars in which he has failed. Firſt, there are ſcarce any characters marked in the Æneid. In this reſpect it is inſipid, when compared to the Iliad, which is full of characters and life. Achates, and Cloanthus, and Gyas, and the reſt of the Trojan heroes who accompanied Æneas into Italy, are ſo many undiſtinguiſhed figures, who are in no way made known to us, either by any ſentiments which they utter, or any memorable exploits which they perform. Even Æneas himſelf is not a very intereſting Hero. He is deſcribed, indeed, as pious and brave; but his character is not marked with any of thoſe ſtrokes that touch the heart; it is a ſort of cold and tame character; and, throughout his behaviour to Dido, in the fourth book, eſpecially in the ſpeech which he makes after ſhe ſuſpected his intention of leaving her, there appears a certain hardneſs, and want of relenting, which

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is far from rendering him amiable *. Dido's own character is by much the beſt ſupported, in the whole Æneid. The warmth of her paſſions, the keenneſs of her indignation and reſentment, and the violence of her whole character, exhibit a figure greatly more animated than any other which Virgil has drawn.

Besides this defect of character in the Æneid, the diſtribution and management of the ſubject are, in ſome reſpects, exceptionable. The Æneid, it is true, muſt be conſidered with the indulgence due to a work not thoroughly completed. The ſix laſt books are ſaid not to have received the finiſhing hand of the Author; and for this reaſon, he ordered, by his will, the Æneid to be committed to the flames. But though this may account for incorrectneſs of execution, it does not apologize for a falling off in the ſubject, which ſeems to take place in the latter part of the work. The wars with the Latins are inferior, in point of dignity, to the more intereſting objects which had before been preſented to us, in the deſtruction of Troy, the intrigue with Dido, and the deſcent into Hell. And in thoſe Italian wars, there is, perhaps, a more material fault ſtill, in the conduct of the ſtory. The Reader, as Voltaire has obſerved, is tempted to take part with Turnus againſt

* Num fletu ingemuit noſtro? Num lumina flexit?
Num lachrymas victus dedit? Aut miſeratus amantem eſt?
Æn. iv. 368.

Æneas. Turnus, a brave young prince, in love with Lavinia, his near relation, is deſtined for her by general conſent, and highly favoured by her mother. Lavinia herſelf diſcovers no reluctance to the match: when there arrives a ſtranger, a fugitive from a diſtant region, who had never ſeen her, and who founding a claim to an eſtabliſhment in Italy upon oracles and prophecies, embroils the country in war, kills the lover of Livinia, and proves the occaſion of her mother's death. Such a plan is not fortunately laid, for diſpoſing us to be favourable to the Hero of the Poem; and the defect might have been eaſily remedied, by the Poet's making Æneas, inſtead of diſtreſſing Lavinia, deliver her from the perſecution of ſome rival who was odious to her, and to the whole country.

But, notwithſtanding theſe defects, which it was neceſſary to remark, Virgil poſſeſſes beauties which have juſtly drawn the admiration of ages, and which, to this day, hold the balance in equilibrium between his fame and that of Homer. The principal and diſtinguiſhing excellency of Virgil, and which, in my opinion, he poſſeſſes beyond all Poets, is Tenderneſs. Nature had endowed him with exquiſite ſenſibility; he felt every affecting circumſtance in the ſcenes he deſcribes; and, by a ſingle ſtroke, he knows how to reach the heart. This, in an Epic Poem, is the merit next to ſublimity; and puts it in an Author's power to render his Compoſition extremely intereſting to all Readers.

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THE chief beauty, of this kind, in the Iliad, is, the interview of Hector with Andromache. But, in the Æneid, there are many ſuch. The ſecond book is one of the greateſt maſter-pieces that ever was executed by any hand; and Virgil ſeems to have put forth there the whole ſtrength of his genius, as the ſubject afforded a variety of ſcenes, both of the awful and tender kind. The images of horror, preſented by a city burned and ſacked in the night, are finely mixed with pathetic and affecting incidents. Nothing, in any Poet, is more beautifully deſcribed than the death of old Priam; and the family-pieces of Æneas, Anchiſes, and Creuſa, are as tender as can be conceived. In many paſſages of the Æneid, the ſame pathetic ſpirit ſhines; and they have been always the favourite paſſages in that work. The fourth book, for inſtance, relating the unhappy paſſion and death of Dido has been always moſt juſtly admired, and abounds with beauties of the higheſt kind. The interview of Æneas with Andromache and Helenus, in the third book; the Epiſodes of Pallas and Evander, of Niſus and Euryalus, of Lauſus and Mezentius, in the Italian wars, are all ſtriking inſtances of the Poet's power of raiſing the tender emotions. For we muſt obſerve, that though the Æneid be an unequal Poem, and, in ſome places, languid, yet there are beauties ſcattered through it all; and not a few, even in the laſt ſix books. The beſt and moſt finiſhed books, upon the whole, are, the firſt, the ſecond, the fourth, the ſixth, the ſeventh, the eighth, and the twelfth.

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Virgil's battles are far inferior to Homer's in point of fire and ſublimity: but there is one important Epiſode, the Deſcent into Hell, in which he has outdone Homer in the Odyſſey, by many degrees. There is nothing in all antiquity equal, in its kind, to the ſixth book of the Æneid. The ſcenery and the objects are great and ſtriking, and fill the mind with that ſolemn awe, which was to be expected from a view of the inviſible world. There runs through the whole deſcription, a certain philoſophical ſublime; which Virgil's Platonic Genius, and the enlarged ideas of the Auguſtan age, enabled him to ſupport with a degree of majeſty, far beyond what the rude ideas of Homer's age ſuffered him to attain. With regard to the ſweetneſs and beauty of Virgil's numbers, throughout his whole works, they are ſo well known, that it were needleſs to enlarge in the praiſe of them.

Upon the whole, as to the comparative merit of theſe two great princes of Epic Poetry, Homer and Virgil; the former muſt, undoubtedly, be admitted to be the greater Genius; the latter, to be the more correct Writer. Homer was an original in his art, and diſcovers both the beauties and the defects which are to be expected in an original Author, compared with thoſe who ſucceed him; more boldneſs, more nature and eaſe, more ſublimity and force; but greater irregularities and negligences in Compoſition. Virgil has, all along, kept his eye upon Homer; in many places, he has not ſo much imitated, as he

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he has literally tranſlated him. The deſcription of the Storm, for inſtance, in the firſt Æneid, and Æneas's ſpeech upon that occaſion, are tranſlations from the fifth book of the Odyſſey; not to mention almoſt all the ſimilies of Virgil, which are no other than copies of thoſe of Homer. The pre-eminence in invention, therefore, muſt, beyond doubt, be aſcribed to Homer. As to the pre-eminence in judgment, though many Critics are diſpoſed to give it to Virgil, yet, in my opinion, it hangs doubtful. In Homer, we diſcern all the Greek vivacity; in Virgil, all the Roman ſtatelineſs. Homer's imagination is by much the moſt rich and copious; Virgil's, the moſt chaſte and correct. The ſtrength of the former lies in his power of warming the fancy; that of the latter, in his power of touching the heart. Homer's ſtyle is more ſimple and animated; Virgil's more elegant and uniform. The firſt has, on many occaſions, a ſublimity to which the latter never attains; but the latter, in return, never ſinks below a certain degree of Epic dignity, which cannot ſo clearly be pronounced of the former. Not, however, to detract from the admiration due to both theſe great Poets, moſt of Homer's defects may reaſonably be imputed, not to his genius, but to the manners of the age in which he lived; and for the feeble paſſages of the Æneid, this excuſe ought to be admitted, that the Æneid was left an unfiniſhed work.

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LUCAN's PHARSALIA—TASSO's JERUSALEM —CAMOENS' LUSIAD—FENELON's TELEMACHUS—VOLTAIRE's HENRIADE —MILTON's PARADISE LOST.

AFTER Homer and Virgil, the next great Epic Poet of antient times, who preſents himſelf, is Lucan. He is a Poet who deſerves our attention, on account of a very peculiar mixture of great beauties with great faults. Though his Pharſalia diſcover too little invention, and be conducted in too hiſtorical a manner, to be accounted a perfectly regular Epic Poem, yet it were the mere ſqueamiſhneſs of Criticiſm, to exclude it from the Epic claſs. The boundaries, as I formerly remarked, are far from being aſcertained by any ſuch preciſe limit, that we muſt refuſe the Epic name to a Poem, which treats of great and heroic adventures, becauſe it is not exactly conformable to the plans of Homer and Virgil. The ſubject of the Pharſalia carries, undoubtedly, all the Epic Grandeur and Dignity;

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nity; neither does it want unity of object, viz. the Triumph of Cæsar over the Roman Liberty. As it stands at present, it is, indeed, brought to no proper close. But either time has deprived us of the last books, or it has been left by the Author an incomplete work.

THOUGH Lucan's subject be abundantly heroic, yet I cannot reckon him happy in the choice of it. It has two defects. The one is, that civil wars, especially when as fierce and cruel as those of the Romans, present too many shocking objects to be fit for Epic Poetry, and give odious and disgusting views of human nature. Gallant and honourable atchievements furnish a more proper theme for the Epic Muse. But Lucan's Genius, it must be confessed, seems to delight in savage scenes; he dwells upon them too much; and, not content with those which his subject naturally furnished, he goes out of his way to introduce a long Episode of Marius and Sylla's proscriptions, which abounds with all the forms of atrocious cruelty.

THE other defect of Lucan's subject is, its being too near the times in which he lived. This is a circumstance, as I observed in a former Lecture, always unfortunate for a Poet; as it deprives him of the assistance of fiction and machinery; and thereby renders his work less splendid and amusing. Lucan has submitted to this disadvantage of his subject; and in doing so, has acted with more propriety, than if he had

" in our bodies, while a man is in apparent health,
" the effect of some inward debility, which has
" been growing upon him, may, for a time, be
" concealed; but, as soon as it comes the length
" of disease, all his secret infirmities show them-
" selves in whatever part of his frame the disorder
" is lodged; so, in states and monarchies, while
" they carry on a war abroad, many defects escape
" the general eye; but, as soon as war reaches
" their own territory, their infirmities come forth
" to general observation.

" FORTUNE has great influence in all human
" affairs; but I, for my part, should prefer the
" fortune of Athens, with the least degree of vi-
" gour in asserting your cause, to this man's for-
" tune. For we have many better reasons to de-
" pend upon the favour of Heaven than this man.
" But, indeed, he who will not exert his own
" strength, hath no title to depend either on his
" friends, or on the gods. Is it at all surprising
" that he, who is himself ever amidst the labours
" and dangers of the field; who is every where;
" whom no opportunity escapes; to whom no sea-
" son is unfavourable; should be superior to you,
" who are wholly engaged in contriving delays,
" and framing decrees, and inquiring after news?
" The contrary would be much more surprising,
" if we, who have never hitherto acted as became
" a state engaged in war, should conquer one who
" acts, in every instance, with indefatigable vigi-

" lance. It is this, Athenians! it is this which " gives him all his advantage against you. Philip, " constantly surrounded by his troops, and per- " petually engaged in projecting his designs, can, " in a moment, strike the blow where he pleases. " But we, when any accident alarms us, first ap- " point our Trierarchs; then we allow them to ex- " change by substitution: then the supplies are " considered; next, we resolve to man our fleet " with strangers and foreigners; then find it ne- " cessary to supply their place ourselves. In the " midst of these delays, what we are sailing to de- " fend, the enemy is already master of; for the " time of action is spent by us in preparing; and " the issues of war will not wait for our slow and " irresolute measures.

" CONSIDER then your present situation, and " make such provision as the urgent danger re- " quires. Talk not of your ten thousands, or " your twenty thousand foreigners; of those ar- " mies which appear so magnificent on paper " only; great and terrible in your decrees, in ex- " ecution weak and contemptible. But let your " army be made up chiefly of the native forces of " the state; let it be an Athenian strength to " which you are to trust; and whomsoever you " appoint as general, let them be entirely un- " der his guidance and authority. For, ever " since our armies have been formed of fo- " reigners alone, their victories have been gained

" over our allies and confederates only, while " our enemies have risen to an extravagance of " power."

THE orator goes on to point out the number of forces which should be raised; the places of their destination; the season of the year in which they should set out; and then proposes in form his motion, as we would call it, or his decree, for the necessary supply of money, and for ascertaining the funds from which it should be raised. Having finished all that relates to the business under deliberation, he concludes these orations on public affairs, commonly with no longer peroration than the following, which terminates the first Philippic: " I, for my part, have never, upon any oc- " casion, chosen to court your favour, by speak- " ing any thing but what I was convinced would " serve you. And, on this occasion, you have " heard my sentiments freely declared, without " art, and without reserve. I should have been " pleased, indeed, that, as it is for your advantage, " to have your true interest laid before you, so I " might have been assured, that he who layeth it " before you would share the advantage. But, " uncertain as I know the consequence to be with " respect to myself, I yet determined to speak, " because I was convinced that these measures, " if pursued, must prove beneficial to the public. " And, of all those opinions which shall be offered " to your acceptance, may the gods determine

" that to be chosen which will best advance the " general welfare."

THESE extracts may serve to give some imperfect idea of the manner of Demosthenes. For a juster and more complete one, recourse must be had to the excellent original.

LECTURE XXVIII.

ELOQUENCE OF THE BAR—ANALYSIS OF CICERO'S ORATION FOR CLUENTIUS.

I TREATED, in the last Lecture, of what is peculiar to the eloquence of popular assemblies. Much of what was said on that head is applicable to the eloquence of the Bar, the next great scene of public speaking to which I now proceed, and my observations upon which will therefore be the shorter. All, however, that was said in the former Lecture must not be applied to it; and it is of importance, that I begin with shewing where the distinction lies.

IN the first place, the ends of speaking at the Bar, and in popular assemblies, are commonly different. In popular assemblies, the great object is persuasion; the orator aims at determining the hearers to some choice or conduct, as good, fit, or useful. For accomplishing this end, it is incumbent on him to apply himself to all the principles of action in our nature; to the passions and to the

heart, as well as to the understanding. But, at the Bar, conviction is the great object. There, it is not the speaker's business to persuade the judges to what is good or useful, but to shew them what is just and true; and, of course, it is chiefly, or solely, to the understanding that his eloquence is addressed. This is a characteristical difference which ought ever to be kept in view.

In the next place, speakers at the Bar address themselves to one or to a few judges, and these, too, persons generally of age, gravity, and authority of character. There they have not those advantages which a mixed and numerous assembly affords for employing all the arts of speech, even supposing their subject to admit them. Passion does not rise so easily; the speaker is heard more coolly; he is watched over more severely; and would expose himself to ridicule, by attempting that high vehement tone, which is only proper in speaking to a multitude.

In the last place, the nature and management of the subjects which belong to the Bar, require a very different species of oratory from that of popular assemblies. In the latter, the speaker has a much wider range. He is seldom confined to any precise rule; he can fetch his topics from a great variety of quarters; and employ every illustration which his fancy or imagination suggests. But, at the Bar, the field of speaking is

limited to precise law and statute. Imagination is not allowed to take its scope. The advocate has always lying before him the line, the square, and the compass. These, it is his principal business to be uniformly applying to the subjects under debate.

FOR these reasons, it is clear, that the eloquence of the Bar is of a much more limited, more sober and chastened kind, than that of popular assemblies; and, for similar reasons, we must beware of considering even the judicial orations of Cicero or Demosthenes as exact models of the manner of speaking, which is adapted to the present state of the Bar. It is necessary to warn young lawyers of this; because, though these were pleadings spoken in civil or criminal causes, yet, in fact, the nature of the Bar anciently, both in Greece and Rome, allowed a much nearer approach to popular eloquence, than what it now does. This was owing chiefly to two causes.

FIRST, Because in the ancient judicial orations, strict law was much less an object of attention than it is become among us. In the days of Demosthenes and Cicero, the municipal statutes were few, simple, and general; and the decision of causes was trusted, in a great measure, to the equity and common sense of the judges. Eloquence, much more than jurisprudence, was the study of those who were to plead causes. Cicero

somewhere says, that three months study was sufficient to make any man a complete civilian; nay, it was thought that one might be a good pleader at the Bar, who had never studied law at all. For there were among the Romans a set of men called *Pragmatici*, whose office it was to give the orator all the law knowledge which the cause he was to plead required, and which he put into that popular form, and dressed up with those colours of eloquence, that were best fitted for influencing the judges before whom he spoke.

WE may observe next, that the civil and criminal judges, both in Greece and Rome, were commonly much more numerous than they are with us, and formed a sort of popular assembly. The renowned tribunal of the Areopagus at Athens consisted of fifty judges at the least.* Some make it to consist of a great many more. When Socrates was condemned, by what court it is uncertain, we are informed that no fewer than 280 voted against him. In Rome, the Prætor, who was the proper judge both in civil and criminal causes, named for every cause of moment, the *Judices Selecti*, as they were called, who were always numerous, and had the office and power of both judge and jury. In the famous cause of Milo, Cicero spoke to fifty-one *Judices Selecti*, and so

* Vide Potter Antiq. vol. i. p. 102.

had the advantage of addressing his whole pleading, not to one or a few learned judges of the point of law, as is the case with us, but to an assembly of Roman citizens. Hence all those arts of popular eloquence, which we find the Roman orator so frequently employing, and probably with much success. Hence tears and commiseration are so often made use of as the instruments of gaining a cause. Hence certain practices, which would be reckoned theatrical among us, were common at the Roman Bar; such as introducing not only the accused person dressed in deep mourning, but presenting to the judges his family, and his young children, endeavouring to move them by their cries and tears.

FOR these reasons, on account of the wide difference between the ancient and modern state of the Bar, to which we may add also the difference in the turn of ancient and modern eloquence, which I formerly took notice of, too strict an imitation of Cicero's manner of pleading would now be extremely injudicious. To great advantage he may still be studied by every speaker at the Bar. In the address with which he opens his subject, and the insinuation he employs for gaining the favour of the judges; in the distinct arrangement of his facts; in the gracefulness of his narration; in the conduct and exposition of his arguments, he may and he ought to be imitated. A higher pattern cannot be set before us; but one who

should imitate him also in his exaggeration and amplifications, in his diffuse and pompous declamation, and in his attempts to raise passion, would now make himself almost as ridiculous at the Bar, as if he should appear there in the *Toga* of a Roman lawyer.

BEFORE I descend to more particular directions concerning the eloquence of the Bar, I must be allowed to take notice, that the foundation of a lawyer's reputation and success must always be laid in a profound knowledge of his own profession. Nothing is of such consequence to him, or deserves more his deep and serious study. For whatever his abilities as a speaker may be, if his knowledge of the law be reckoned superficial, few will chuse to commit their cause to him. Besides previous study, and a proper stock of knowledge attained, another thing highly material to the success of every pleader, is a diligent and painful attention to every cause with which he is entrusted, so as to be thoroughly master of all the facts and circumstances relating to it. On this the ancient rhetoricians insist with great earnestness, and justly represent it as a necessary basis to all the eloquence that can be exerted in pleading. Cicero tells us (under the character of Antonius, in the second book De Oratore), that he always conversed at full length with every client who came to consult him; that he took care there should be no witness to their conversation, in order that his

client might explain himself more freely; that he was wont to start every objection, and to plead the cause of the adverse party with him, that he might come at the whole truth, and be fully prepared on every point of the business; and that, after the client had retired, he used to balance all the facts with himself, under three different characters, his own, that of the judge, and that of the advocate on the opposite side. He censures very severely those of the profession who declined taking so much trouble; taxing them not only with shameful negligence, but with dishonesty and breach of trust*. To the same purpose Quinctilian, in the eighth chapter of his last book, delivers a great many excellent rules concerning all the methods which a lawyer should employ for attaining the most thorough knowledge of the cause he is to plead; again and again recommending patience and attention in conversation with clients, and observing very sensibly, "Non tam obest audire supervacua, quam igno-

* "Equidem soleo dare operam, ut de sua quisque re me ipse "doceat; et nequis alius adsit, quo liberius loquatur; et agere "adversarii causam, ut ille agat suam; et quicquid de sua re co- "gitaret, in medium proferat. Itaque cùm ille decessit, tres per- "sonas unus sustineo, summâ animi equitate; meam, adversarii, "judicis.—Nonnulli dum operam suam multam existimari vo- "lunt, ut toto foro volitare, et accusa ad causam ire videantur, "causas dicunt incognitas. In quo est illa quidem magna offen- "sio, vel negligentiæ susceptis rebus, vel perfidiæ receptis; sed "etiam illa, major opinione, quod nemo potest de ea re quam non "novit, non turpissimè dicere."

" rare necessaria. Frequenter enim et vulnus, et " remedium, in iis orator inveniet quæ litigatori " in neutram partem, habere momentum vide- " bantur*."

SUPPOSING an advocate to be thus prepared, with all the knowledge which the study of the law in general, and of that cause which he is to plead in particular, can furnish him, I must next observe, that eloquence in pleading is of the highest moment for giving support to a cause. It were altogether wrong to infer, that because the ancient popular and vehement manner of pleading is now in a great measure superseded, there is, therefore, no room for eloquence at the Bar, and that the study of it is become superfluous. Though the manner of speaking be changed, yet still there is a right and a proper manner, which deserves to be studied as much as ever. Perhaps there is no scene of public speaking where eloquence is more necessary. For, on other occasions, the subject on which men speak in public, is frequently sufficient, by itself, to interest the hearers. But the dryness and subtilty of the subjects generally agitated at the Bar, require, more than any other, a certain

* " To listen to something that is superfluous can do no hurt; " whereas to be ignorant of something that is material, may be " highly prejudicial. The advocate will frequently discover the " weak side of a cause, and learn, at the same time, what is the " proper defence, from circumstances which, to the party him- " self, appeared to be of little or no moment."

kind of eloquence in order to command attention; in order to give proper weight to the arguments that are employed, and to prevent any thing which the pleader advances from passing unregarded. The effect of good speaking is always very great. There is as much difference in the impression made upon the hearers, by a cold, dry, and confused speaker, and that made by one who pleads the same cause with elegance, order, and strength, as there is between our conception of an object, when it is presented to us in a dim light, and when we behold it in a full and clear one.

It is no small encouragement to eloquence at the bar, that of all liberal professions, none gives fairer play to genius and abilities than that of the advocate. He is less exposed than some others, to suffer by the arts of rivalry, by popular prejudices, or secret intrigues. He is sure of coming forward according to his merit; for he stands forth every day to view; he enters the list boldly with his competitors; every appearance which he makes is an appeal to the public; whose decision seldom fails of being just, because it is impartial. Interest and friends may set forward a young pleader with peculiar advantages beyond others, at the beginning; but they can do no more than open the field to him. A reputation resting on these assistances will soon fall. Spectators remark, judges decide, parties watch; and to him will the multitude of clients never fail to resort, who gives

the most approved specimens of his knowledge, eloquence, and industry.

IT must be laid down for a first principle, that the eloquence suited to the Bar, whether in speaking, or in writing law papers, is of the calm and temperate kind, and connected with close reasoning. Sometimes a little play may be allowed to the imagination, in order to enliven a dry subject, and to give relief to the fatigue of attention; but this liberty must be taken with a sparing hand. For a florid style, and a sparkling manner, never fail to make the speaker be heard with a jealous ear by the judge. They detract from his weight, and always produce a suspicion of his failing in soundness and strength of argument. It is purity and neatness of expression which is chiefly to be studied; a style perspicuous and proper, which shall not be needlessly overcharged with the pedantry of law terms, and where, at the same time, no affectation shall appear of avoiding these, when they are suitable and necessary.

VERBOSITY is a common fault, of which the gentlemen of this profession are accused; and into which the habit of speaking and writing so hastily, and with so little preparation, as they are often obliged to do, almost unavoidably betrays them. It cannot therefore, be too much recommended to those who are beginning to practise at the Bar, that they should early study to guard

against this, while as yet they have full leisure for preparation. Let them form themselves, especially in the papers which they write, to the habit of a strong and a correct style; which expresses the same thing much better in a few words, than is done by the accumulation of intricate and endless periods. If this habit be once acquired, it will become natural to them afterwards, when the multiplicity of business shall force them to compose in a more precipitant manner. Whereas, if the practice of a loose and negligent style has been suffered to become familiar, it will not be in their power, even upon occasions when they wish to make an unusual effort, to express themselves with energy and grace.

DISTINCTNESS is a capital property in speaking at the Bar. This should be shewn chiefly in two things: first, in stating the question; in shewing clearly what is the point in debate; what we admit; what we deny; and where the line of division begins between us and the adverse party. Next, it should be shewn in the order and arrangement of all the parts of the pleading. In every sort of oration, a clear method is of the utmost consequence; but in those embroiled and difficult cases which belong to the Bar, it is almost all in all. Too much pains, therefore, cannot be taken in previously studying the plan and method. If there be indistinctness and disorder there, we can have no success in convincing; we leave the whole cause in darkness.

WITH respect to the conduct of narration and argumentation, I shall hereafter make several remarks, when I come to treat of the component parts of a regular oration. I shall at present only observe, that the narration of facts at the Bar, should always be as concise as the nature of them will admit. Facts are always of the greatest consequence to be remembered during the course of the pleading; but if the pleader be tedious in his manner of relating them, and needlessly circumstantial, he lays too great a load upon the memory. Whereas, by cutting off all superfluous circumstances in his recital, he adds strength to the material facts: he both gives a clearer view of what he relates, and makes the impression of it more lasting. In argumentation, again, I would incline to give scope to a more diffuse manner at the Bar, than on some other occasions. For, in popular assemblies, where the subject of debate is often a plain question, arguments, taken from known topics, gain strength by their conciseness. But the obscurity of law points frequently requires the arguments to be spread out, and placed in different lights, in order to be fully apprehended.

WHEN the pleader comes to refute the arguments employed by his adversary, he should be on his guard not to do them injustice, by disguising or placing them in a false light. The deceit is soon discovered: it will not fail of being exposed; and tends to impress the judge and the hearers

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ſtructions of Mentor, which recur upon us too often; and too much upon the ſtrain of common-place morality. Though theſe were well ſuited to the main deſign of the Author, which was to form the mind of a young Prince, yet they ſeem not congruous to the nature of Epic Poetry; the object of which is to improve us by means of actions, characters, and ſentiments, rather than by delivering profeſſed and formal inſtruction.

Several of the Epic Poets have deſcribed a deſcent into Hell; and in the proſpects they have given us of the inviſible world, we may obſerve the gradual refinement of men's notions concerning a ſtate of future rewards and puniſhments. The deſcent of Ulyſſes into Hell, in Homer's Odyſſey, preſents to us a very indiſtinct and dreary ſort of object. The ſcene is laid in the country of the Cimmerians, which is always covered with clouds and darkneſs, at the extremity of the ocean. When the ſpirits of the dead begin to appear, we ſcarcely know whether Ulyſſes is above ground, or below it. None of the ghoſts, even of the heroes, appear ſatisfied with their condition in the other world; and when Ulyſſes endeavours to comfort Achilles, by reminding him of the illuſtrious figure which he muſt make in thoſe regions, Achilles roundly tells him, that all ſuch ſpeeches are idle; for he would rather be a day-labourer on earth, than have the command of all the dead.

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In the Sixth Book of the Æneid, we diſcern a much greater refinement of Ideas, correſponding to the progreſs which the world had then made in philoſophy. The objects there delineated are both more clear and diſtinct, and more grand and awful. The ſeparate manſions of good and of bad ſpirits, with the puniſhments of the one, and the employments and happineſs of the other, are finely deſcribed; and in conſiſtency with the moſt pure morality. But the viſit which Fenelon makes Telemachus pay to the ſhades, is much more philoſophical ſtill than Virgil's. He employs the ſame fables and the ſame mythology; but we find the antient mythology refined by the knowledge of the true religion, and adorned with that beautiful enthuſiaſm, for which Fenelon was ſo diſtinguiſhed. His account of the happineſs of the juſt is an excellent deſcription in the myſtic ſtrain; and very expreſſive of the genius and ſpirit of the Author.

Voltaire has given us, in his Henriade, a regular Epic Poem, in French verſe. In every performance of that celebrated Writer, we may expect to find marks of genius; and, accordingly, that work diſcovers, in ſeveral places, that boldneſs in the conceptions, and that livelineſs and felicity in the expreſſion, for which the Author is ſo remarkably diſtinguiſhed. Several of the compariſons, in particular, which occur in it, are both new and happy. But conſidered upon the whole, I cannot eſteem it one of

of his chief productions; and am of opinion, LECT. XLIV.
that he has ſucceeded infinitely better in Tragic, than in Epic Compoſition. French Verſification ſeems ill adapted to Epic Poetry. Beſides its being always fettered by rhyme, the language never aſſumes a ſufficient degree of elevation or majeſty; and appears to be more capable of expreſſing the tender in Tragedy, than of ſupporting the ſublime in Epic. Hence a feebleneſs, and ſometimes a proſaic flatneſs, in the Style of the Henriade; and whether from this, or from ſome other cauſe, the Poem often languiſhes. It does not ſeize the imagination; nor intereſt and carry the Reader along, with that ardour which ought to be inſpired by a ſublime and ſpirited Epic Poem.

The ſubject of the Henriade, is the triumph of Henry the Fourth over the arms of the League. The action of the Poem, properly includes only the Siege of Paris. It is an action perfectly Epic in its nature; great, intereſting, and conducted with a ſufficient regard to unity, and all the other critical rules. But it is liable to both the defects which I before remarked in Lucan's Pharſalia. It is founded wholly on civil wars; and preſents to us thoſe odious and deteſtable objects of maſſacres and aſſaſſinations, which throw a gloom over the Poem. It is alſo, like Lucan's, of too recent a date, and comes too much within the bounds of well-known hiſtory. To remember this laſt defect, and to remove the appearance of being a mere hiſtorian, Voltaire has choſen

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to mix fiction with truth. The Poem, for inſtance, opens with a voyage of Henry's to England, and an interview between him and Queen Elizabeth; though every one knows that Henry never was in England, and that theſe two illuſtrious perſonages never met. In facts of ſuch public notoriety, a fiction like this ſhocks the Reader, and forms an unnatural and ill-ſorted mixture with hiſtorical truth. The Epiſode was contrived, in order to give Henry an opportunity of recounting the former tranſactions of the civil wars, in imitation of the recital which Æneas makes to Dido in the Æneid. But the imitation was injudicious. Æneas might, with propriety, relate to Dido, tranſactions of which ſhe was either entirely ignorant, or had acquired only an imperfect knowledge by flying reports. But Queen Elizabeth could not but be ſuppoſed to be perfectly appriſed of all the facts, which the Poet makes Henry recite to her.

In order to embelliſh his ſubject, Voltaire has choſen to employ a great deal of Machinery. But here, alſo, I am obliged to cenſure his conduct; for the Machinery, which he chiefly employs, is of the worſt kind, and the leaſt ſuited to an Epic Poem, that of allegorical beings. Diſcord, Cunning, and Love, appear as perſonages, mix with the human actors, and make a conſiderable figure in the intrigue of the Poem. This is contrary to every rule of rational criticiſm. Ghoſts, Angels, and Devils have popular belief on their ſide, and may be conceived as exiſting.

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But every one knows, that allegorical beings are no more than repreſentations of human diſpoſitions and paſſions. They may be employed like other Perſonifications and Figures of Speech; or in a Poem, that is wholly allegorical, they may occupy the chief place. They are there in their native and proper region; but in a Poem which relates to human tranſactions, as I had occaſion before to remark, when ſuch beings are deſcribed as acting along with men, the imagination is confounded; it is divided between phantaſms and realities, and knows not on what to reſt.

In juſtice, however, to our Author, I muſt obſerve, that the Machinery of St. Louis, which he alſo employs, is of a better kind, and poſſeſſes real dignity. The fineſt paſſage in the Henriade, indeed one of the fineſt that occurs in any Poem, is the proſpect of the inviſible world, which St. Louis gives to Henry in a dream, in the Seventh Canto. Death bringing the ſouls of the departed in ſucceſſion before God; their aſtoniſhment, when, arriving from all different countries and religious ſects, they are brought into the divine preſence; when they find their ſuperſtitions to be falſe, and have the truth unveiled to them; the palace of the Deſtinies opened to Henry, and the proſpect of his ſucceſſors which is there given him; are ſtriking and magnificent objects, and do honour to the genius of Voltaire.

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THOUGH ſome of the Epiſodes in this Poem are properly extended, yet the Narration is, on the whole, too general; the events are too much crowded, and ſuperficially related; which is, doubtleſs, one cauſe of the Poem making a faint impreſſion. The ſtrain of ſentiment which runs through it, is high and noble. Religion appears, on every occaſion, with great and proper luſtre; and the Author breathes that ſpirit of humanity and toleration, which is conſpicuous in all his works.

MILTON, of whom it remains now to ſpeak, has chalked out for himſelf a new, and very extraordinary road, in Poetry. As ſoon as we open his Paradiſe Loſt, we find ourſelves introduced all at once into an inviſible world, and ſurrounded with celeſtial and infernal beings. Angels and Devils are not the Machinery, but principal actors, in the Poem; and what, in any other compoſition, would be the marvellous, is here only the natural courſe of events. A ſubject ſo remote from the affairs of this world, may furniſh ground to thoſe who think ſuch diſcuſſions material, to bring it into doubt, whether Paradiſe Loſt can properly be claſſed among Epic Poems. By whatever name it is to be called, it is, undoubtedly, one of the higheſt efforts of poetical genius; and in one great characteriſtic of the Epic Poem, Majeſty and Sublimity, it is fully equal to any that bear that name.

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How far the Author was altogether happy in the choice of his ſubject, may be queſtioned. It has led him into very difficult ground. Had he taken a ſubject that was more human, and leſs theological; that was more connected with the occurrences of life; and afforded a greater diſplay of the characters and paſſions of men, his Poem would, perhaps, have, to the bulk of Readers, been more pleaſing and attractive. But the ſubject which he has choſen, ſuited the daring ſublimity of his genius *. It is a ſubject for which Milton alone was fitted; and in the conduct of it, he has ſhown a ſtretch both of imagination and invention, which is perfectly wonderful. It is aſtoniſhing how, from the few hints given us in the Sacred Scriptures, he was able to raiſe ſo complete and regular a ſtructure; and to fill his Poem with ſuch a variety of incidents. Dry and harſh paſſages ſometimes occur. The Author appears, upon ſome occaſions, a Metaphyſician and a Divine, rather than a Poet. But the general tenor of his work is intereſting; he ſeizes and fixes the imagination; engages, elevates, and affects us as we proceed, which is always a ſure teſt of merit in an Epic Compoſi-

* "He ſeems to have been well acquainted with his own "genius, and to know what it was that nature had beſtowed "upon him more bountifully than upon others; the power of "diſplaying the vaſt, illuminating the ſplendid, enforcing the "awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful. "He therefore choſe a ſubject, on which too much could not "be ſaid; on which he might tire his fancy, without the cen-"ſure of extravagance." Dr. JOHNSON's Life of Milton.

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tion. The artful change of his objects; the ſcene laid now in Earth, now in Hell, and now in Heaven, affords a ſufficient diverſity; while unity of plan is, at the ſame time, perfectly ſupported. We have ſtill life, and calm ſcenes, in the employments of Adam and Eve in Paradiſe; and we have buſy ſcenes, and great actions, in the enterpriſe of Satan, and the wars of the Angels. The innocence, purity, and amiableneſs of our firſt parents, oppoſed to the pride and ambition of Satan, furniſhes a happy contraſt, that reigns throughout the whole Poem; only the Concluſion, as I before obſerved, is too tragic for Epic Poetry.

THE nature of the ſubject did not admit any great diſplay of characters; but ſuch as could be introduced, are ſupported with much propriety. Satan, in particular, makes a ſtriking figure, and is indeed the beſt drawn character in the Poem. Milton has not deſcribed him ſuch as we ſuppoſe an infernal ſpirit to be. He has, more ſuitably to his own purpoſe, given him a human, that is, a mixed character, not altogether void of ſome good qualities. He is brave and faithful to his troops. In the midſt of his impiety, he is not without remorſe. He is even touched with pity for our firſt parents; and juſtifies himſelf in his deſign againſt them, from the neceſſity of his ſituation. He is actuated by ambition and reſentment, rather than by pure malice. In ſhort, Milton's Satan is no worſe than many a conſpirator or factious chief that

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that makes a figure in hiſtory. The different characters of Beelzebub, Moloch, Belial, are exceedingly well painted in thoſe eloquent ſpeeches which they make in the Second Book. The good Angels, though always deſcribed with dignity and propriety, have more uniformity than the infernal Spirits in their appearance; though among them, too, the dignity of Michael, the mild condeſcenſion of Raphael, and the tried fidelity of Abdiel, form proper characteriſtical diſtinctions. The attempt to deſcribe God Almighty himſelf, and to recount dialogues between the Father and the Son, was too bold and arduous, and is that wherein our Poet, as was to have been expected, has been moſt unſucceſsful. With regard to his human characters; the innocence of our firſt parents, and their love, are finely and delicately painted. In ſome of his ſpeeches to Raphael and to Eve, Adam, is, perhaps, too knowing and refined for his ſituation. Eve is more diſtinctly characteriſed. Her gentleneſs, modeſty, and frailty, mark very expreſſively a female character.

MILTON's great and diſtinguiſhing excellence is, his ſublimity. In this, perhaps, he excels Homer; as there is no doubt of his leaving Virgil, and every other Poet, far behind him. Almoſt the whole of the Firſt and Second Books of Paradiſe Loſt are continued inſtances of the ſublime. The proſpect of Hell and of the fallen Hoſt, the appearance and behaviour of Satan, the

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the conſultation of the infernal Chiefs, and Satan's flight through Chaos to the borders of this world, diſcover the moſt lofty ideas that ever entered into the conception of any Poet. In the Sixth Book, alſo, there is much grandeur, particularly in the appearance of the Meſſiah; though ſome parts of that book are cenſurable; and the witticiſms of the Devils upon the effect of their artillery, form an intolerable blemiſh. Milton's ſublimity is of a different kind from that of Homer. Homer's is generally accompanied with fire and impetuoſity; Milton's poſſeſſes more of a calm and amazing grandeur. Homer warms and hurries us along; Milton fixes us in a ſtate of aſtoniſhment and elevation. Homer's ſublimity appears moſt in the deſcription of actions; Milton's, in that of wonderful and ſtupendous objects.

But though Milton is moſt diſtinguiſhed for his ſublimity, yet there is alſo much of the beautiful, the tender, and the pleaſing, in many parts of his work. When the ſcene is laid in Paradiſe, the imagery is always of the moſt gay and ſmiling kind. His deſcriptions ſhow an uncommonly fertile imagination; and in his ſimilies, he is, for the moſt part, remarkably happy. They are ſeldom improperly introduced; ſeldom either low or trite. They generally preſent to us images taken from the ſublime or the beautiful claſs of objects; if they have any faults, it is their alluding too frequently to matters of learning, and to fables of antiquity. In the latter

latter part of Paradiſe loſt, there muſt be confeſſed to be a falling off. With the fall of our firſt parents, Milton's genius ſeems to decline. Beauties, however, there are, in the concluding Books, of the tragic kind. The remorſe and contrition of the guilty pair, and their lamentations over Paradiſe, when they are obliged to leave it, are very moving. The laſt Epiſode of the Angels ſhowing Adam the fate of his poſterity, is happily imagined; but, in many places, the execution is languid. LECT. XLIV.

Milton's Language and Verſification have high merit. His Style is full of majeſty, and wonderfully adapted to his ſubject. His blank verſe is harmonious and diverſified, and affords the moſt complete example of the elevation which our language is capable of attaining by the force of numbers. It does not flow, like the French verſe, in tame, regular, uniform melody, which ſoon tires the ear; but is ſometimes ſmooth and flowing, ſometimes rough; varied in its cadence, and intermixed with diſcords, ſo as to ſuit the ſtrength and freedom of Epic Compoſition. Neglected and proſaic lines, indeed, we ſometimes meet with; but, in a work ſo long, and in the main ſo harmonious, theſe may be forgiven.

On the whole, Paradiſe Loſt is a Poem that abounds with beauties of every kind, and that juſtly entitles its Author to a degree of fame not inferior to any Poet; though it muſt be alſo admitted

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mitted to have many inequalities. It is the lot of almoſt every high and daring genius, not to be uniform and correct. Milton is too frequently theological and metaphyſical; ſometimes harſh in his language; often too technical in his words, and affectedly oſtentatious of his learning. Many of his faults muſt be attributed to the pedantry of the age in which he lived. He diſcovers a vigour, a graſp of genius equal to every thing that is great; if at ſome times he falls much below himſelf, at other times he riſes above every Poet, of the antient or modern world.

LECTURE XLV.

DRAMATIC POETRY—TRAGEDY.

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DRAMATIC Poetry has, among all civilized nations, been conſidered as a rational and uſeful entertainment, and judged worthy of careful and ſerious diſcuſſion. According as it is employed upon the light and the gay, or upon the grave and affecting incidents of human life, it divides itſelf into the two forms of Comedy or Tragedy. But as great and ſerious objects command more attention than little and ludicrous ones; as the fall of a Hero intereſts the public more than the marriage of a private perſon; Tragedy has been always held a more dignified entertainment than Comedy. The one reſts upon the high paſſions, the virtues, crimes, and ſufferings of mankind; the other on their humours, follies, and pleaſures. Terror and pity are the great inſtruments of the former; ridicule is the ſole inſtrument of the latter. Tragedy ſhall therefore be the object of our fulleſt diſcuſſion. This and the following lecture ſhall be employed

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employed on it; after which I ſhall treat of what is peculiar to Comedy.

TRAGEDY, conſidered as an exhibition of the characters and behaviour of men in ſome of the moſt trying and critical ſituations of life, is a noble idea of Poetry. It is a direct imitation of human manners and actions. For it does not, like the Epic Poem, exhibit characters by the narration and deſcription of the Poet; but the Poet diſappears; and the perſonages themſelves are ſet before us, acting and ſpeaking what is ſuitable to their characters. Hence, no kind of writing is ſo great a trial of the Author's profound knowledge of the human heart. No kind of writing has ſo much power, when happily executed, to raiſe the ſtrongeſt emotions. It is, or ought to be, a mirror in which we behold ourſelves, and the evils to which we are expoſed; a faithful copy of the human paſſions, with all their direful effects, when they are ſuffered to become extravagant.

As Tragedy is a high and diſtinguiſhed ſpecies of Compoſition, ſo alſo, in its general ſtrain and ſpirit, it is favourable to virtue. Such power hath virtue happily over the human mind, by the wiſe and gracious conſtitution of our nature, that as admiration cannot be raiſed in Epic Poetry, ſo neither in Tragic Poetry can our paſſions be ſtrongly moved, unleſs virtuous emotions be awakened within us. Every Poet finds, that it is impoſſible to intereſt us in any cha-

racter, without repreſenting that character as worthy and honourable, though it may not be perfect; and that the great ſecret for raiſing indignation, is to paint the perſon who is to be the object of it, in the colours of vice and depravity. He may, indeed, nay, he muſt, repreſent the virtuous as ſometimes unfortunate, becauſe this is often the caſe in real life; but he will always ſtudy to engage our hearts in their behalf; and though they may be deſcribed as unproſperous, yet there is no inſtance of a Tragic Poet repreſenting vice as fully triumphant and happy in the cataſtrophe of the Piece. Even when bad men ſucceed in their deſigns, puniſhment is made always to attend them; and miſery of one kind or other is ſhewn to be unavoidably connected with guilt. Love and admiration of virtuous characters, compaſſion for the injured and the diſtreſſed, and indignation againſt the authors of their ſufferings, are the ſentiments moſt generally excited by Tragedy. And, therefore, though Dramatic Writers may ſometimes, like other Writers, be guilty of improprieties, though they may fail of placing virtue preciſely in the due point of light, yet no reaſonable perſon can deny Tragedy to be a moral ſpecies of Compoſition. Taking Tragedies complexly, I am fully perſuaded, that the impreſſions left by them upon the mind, are, on the whole, favourable to virtue and good diſpoſitions. And, therefore, the zeal which ſome pious men have ſhown againſt the entertainments of the Theatre muſt reſt only upon

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LECT. XLV. upon the abuſe of Comedy; which, indeed, has frequently been ſo great as to juſtify very ſevere cenſures againſt it.

The account which Ariſtotle gives of the deſign of Tragedy is, that it is intended to purge our paſſions by means of pity and terror. This is ſomewhat obſcure. Various ſenſes have been put upon his words, and much altercation has followed among his commentators. Without entering into any controverſy upon this head, the intention of Tragedy may, I think, be more ſhortly and clearly defined, to improve our virtuous ſenſibility. If an Author intereſts us in behalf of virtue, forms us to compaſſion for the diſtreſſed, inſpires us with proper ſentiments, on beholding the viciſſitudes of life, and, by means of the concern which he raiſes for the misfortunes of others, leads us to guard againſt errors in our own conduct, he accompliſhes all the moral purpoſes of Tragedy.

In order to this end, the firſt requiſite is, that he chooſe ſome moving and intereſting ſtory, and that he conduct it in a natural and probable manner. For we muſt obſerve, that the natural and the probable muſt always be the baſis of Tragedy; and are infinitely more important there, than in Epic Poetry. The object of the Epic Poet is to excite our admiration by the recital of heroic adventures; and a much ſlighter degree of probability is required when admiration is concerned, than when the tender paſſions

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are intended to be moved. The imagination, in the former caſe, is exalted, accommodates itſelf to the Poet's idea, and can admit the marvellous without being ſhocked. But Tragedy demands a ſtricter imitation of the life and actions of men. For the end which it purſues is, not ſo much to elevate imagination, as to affect the heart; and the heart always judges more nicely than the imagination, of what is probable. Paſſion can be raiſed, only by making the impreſſions of nature, and of truth, upon the mind. By introducing, therefore, any wild or romantic circumſtances into his Story, the Poet never fails to check paſſion in its growth, and, of courſe, diſappoints the main effect of Tragedy.

This principle, which is founded on the cleareſt reaſon, excludes from Tragedy all Machinery, or fabulous intervention of the Gods. Ghoſts have, indeed, maintained their place; as being ſtrongly founded on popular belief, and peculiarly ſuited to heighten the terror of Tragic Scenes. But all unravellings of the Plot, which turn upon the interpoſition of Deities, ſuch as Euripides employs in ſeveral of his plays, are much to be condemned; both as clumſy and inartificial, and as deſtroying the probability of the Story. This mixture of Machinery, with the Tragic Action, is undoubtedly a blemiſh in the Antient Theatre.

In order to promote that impreſſion of probability which is ſo neceſſary to the ſucceſs of

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Tragedy, ſome Critics have required, that the ſubject ſhould never be a pure fiction invented by the Poet, but built on real hiſtory, or known facts. Such, indeed, were generally, if not always, the ſubjects of the Greek Tragedians. But I cannot hold this to be a matter of any great conſequence. It is proved by experience, that a fictitious tale, if properly conducted, will melt the heart as much as any real hiſtory. In order to our being moved, it is not neceſſary that the events related did actually happen, provided they be ſuch as might eaſily have happened in the ordinary courſe of nature. Even when Tragedy borrows its materials from Hiſtory, it mixes many a fictitious circumſtance. The greateſt part of Readers neither know, nor enquire, what is fabulous, or what is hiſtorical, in the ſubject. They attend only to what is probable, and are touched by events which reſemble nature. Accordingly, ſome of the moſt pathetic Tragedies are entirely fictitious in the ſubject; ſuch as Voltaire's Zaire and Alzire, the Orphan, Douglas, the Fair Penitent, and ſeveral others.

Whether the ſubject be of the real or feigned kind, that on which moſt depends for rendering the incidents in a Tragedy probable, and by means of their probability affecting, is the conduct or management of the Story, and the connection of its ſeveral parts. To regulate this conduct, Critics have laid down the famous rule of the three Unities; the importance of which it

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will be neceſſary to diſcuſs. But, in order to do this with more advantage, it will be neceſſary, that we firſt look backwards, and trace the riſe and origin of Tragedy, which will give light to ſeveral things relating to the ſubject.

TRAGEDY, like other arts, was, in its beginning, rude and imperfect. Among the Greeks, from whom our Dramatic Entertainments are derived, the origin of Tragedy was no other than the Song which was wont to be ſung at the feſtival of Bacchus. A goat was the ſacrifice offered to that God; after the ſacrifice, the Prieſts, with the company that joined them, ſung hymns in honour of Bacchus; and from the name of the victim, τραγος a Goat, joined with ωδη a Song, undoubtedly aroſe the word Tragedy.

THESE Hymns, or Lyric Poems, were ſung ſometimes by the whole company, ſometimes by ſeparate bands, anſwering alternately to each other; making what we call a Chorus, with its Strophes and Antiſtrophes. In order to throw ſome variety into this entertainment, and to relieve the Singers, it was thought proper to introduce a perſon who, between the Songs, ſhould make a recitation in Verſe. Theſpis, who lived about 536 years before the Chriſtian æra, made this innovation; and, as it was reliſhed, Æſchylus, who came 50 years after him, and who is properly the father of Tragedy, went a ſtep farther, introduced a Dialogue between two perſons, or actors, in which he contrived to in-

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terweave ſome intereſting ſtory, and brought his actors on a Stage, adorned with proper ſcenery and decorations. All that theſe actors recited, was called Epiſode, or additional Song; and the Songs of the Chorus were made to relate no longer to Bacchus, their original ſubject, but to the ſtory in which the actors were concerned. This began to give the Drama a regular form, which was ſoon after brought to perfection by Sophocles and Euripides. It is remarkable, in how ſhort a ſpace of time Tragedy grew up among the Greeks, from the rudeſt beginnings to its moſt perfect ſtate. For Sophocles, the greateſt and moſt correct of all the Tragic Poets, flouriſhed only 22 years after Æſchylus, and was little more than 70 years poſterior to Theſpis.

From the account which I have now given, it appears that the Chorus was the baſis or foundation of the antient Tragedy. It was not an ornament added to it; or a contrivance deſigned to render it more perfect; but, in truth, the Dramatic Dialogue was an addition to the Chorus, which was the original entertainment. In proceſs of time, the Chorus, from being the principal, became only the acceſſory in Tragedy; till at laſt, in Modern Tragedy, it has diſappeared altogether; which forms the chief diſtinction between the Antient and the Modern Stage.

This has given riſe to a queſtion much agitated between the partizans of the Antients and

the Moderns, whether the Drama has gained, or has ſuffered, by the abolition of the Chorus? It muſt be admitted, that the Chorus tended to render Tragedy both more magnificent and more inſtructive and moral. It was always the moſt ſublime and poetical part of the work; and being carried on by ſinging, and accompanied with muſic, it muſt, no doubt, have diverſified the Entertainment greatly, and added to its ſplendour. The Chorus, at the ſame time, conveyed conſtant leſſons of virtue. It was compoſed of ſuch perſons as might moſt naturally be ſuppoſed preſent on the occaſion; inhabitants of the place where the ſcene was laid, often the companions of ſome of the principal actors, and therefore, in ſome degree, intereſted in the iſſue of the action. This company, which, in the days of Sophocles, was reſtricted to the number of fifteen perſons, was conſtantly on the Stage, during the whole performance, mingled in diſcourſe with the actors, entered into their concerns, ſuggeſted council and advice to them, moraliſed on all the incidents that were going on, and during the intervals of the action, ſung their Odes, or Songs, in which they addreſſed the Gods, prayed for ſucceſs to the virtuous, lamented their misfortunes, and delivered many religious and moral ſentiments*.

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But,

* The office of the Chorus is thus deſcribed by Horace:

Actoris partes Chorus, officiumque virile
Defendat; neu quid medios intercinat actus,
Quod non propoſito conducat, et hæreat aptè.

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But, notwithſtanding the advantages which were obtained by means of the Chorus, the inconveniences on the other ſide are ſo great, as to render the modern practice of excluding the Chorus far more eligible upon the whole. For if a natural and probable imitation of human actions be the chief end of the Drama, no other perſons ought to be brought on the Stage, than thoſe who are neceſſary to the Dramatic action. The introduction of an adventitious company of perſons, who have but a ſlight concern in the buſineſs of the Play, is unnatural in itſelf, embarraſſing to the Poet, and, though it may render the ſpectacle ſplendid, tends, undoubtedly,

Ille bonis faveatque, et concilietur amicis,
Et regat iratos, et amet peccare timentes:
Ille dapes laudet menſæ brevis; ille ſalubrem
Juſtitiam, legeſque, & apertis otia portis.
Ille tegat commiſſa; deoſque precetur, et oret
Ut redeat miſeris, abeat fortuna ſuperbis.

De Art. Poet. 193.

The Chorus muſt ſupport an actor's part,
Defend the virtuous, and adviſe with art;
Govern the choleric, and the proud appeaſe,
And the ſhort feaſts of frugal tables praiſe;
Applaud the juſtice of well-governed ſtates,
And peace triumphant with her open gates.
Intruſted ſecrets let them ne'er betray,
But to the righteous Gods with ardour pray,
That fortune, with returning ſmiles, may bleſs
Afflicted worth, and impious pride depreſs;
Yet let their ſongs with apt coherence join,
Promote the plot, and aid the juſt deſign.

Francis.

to

to render it more cold and unintereſting, becauſe more unlike a real tranſaction. The mixture of Muſic, or Song, on the part of the Chorus, with the Dialogue carried on by the Actors, is another unnatural circumſtance, removing the repreſentation ſtill farther from the reſemblance of life. The Poet, beſides, is ſubjected to innumerable difficulties in ſo contriving his plan, that the preſence of the Chorus, during all the incidents of the Play, ſhall conſiſt with any probability. The ſcene muſt be conſtantly, and often abſurdly, laid in ſome public place, that the Chorus may be ſuppoſed to have free acceſs to it. To many things that ought to be tranſacted in private, the Chorus muſt ever be witneſſes; they muſt be the confederates of both parties, who come ſucceſſively upon the Stage, and who are, perhaps, conſpiring againſt each other. In ſhort, the management of a Chorus is an unnatural confinement to a Poet; it requires too great a ſacrifice of probability in the conduct of the action; it has too much the air of a theatrical decoration, to be conſiſtent with that appearance of reality, which a Poet muſt ever preſerve in order to move our Paſſions. The origin of Tragedy among the Greeks, we have ſeen, was a choral Song, or Hymn to the Gods. There is no wonder, therefore, that on the Greek Stage it ſo long maintained poſſeſſion. But it may confidently, I think, be aſſerted, that if, inſtead of the Dramatic Dialogue having been ſuperadded to the Chorus, the Dialogue itſelf had been the firſt invention, the Chorus

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would, in that caſe, never have been thought of.

One uſe, I am of opinion, might ſtill be made of the Antient Chorus, and would be a conſiderable improvement of the Modern Theatre; if, inſtead of that unmeaning, and often improperly choſen Muſic, with which the Audience is entertained in the intervals between the Acts, a Chorus were then to be introduced, whoſe Muſic and Songs, though forming no part of the Play, ſhould have a relation to the incidents of the preceding act, and to the diſpoſitions which thoſe incidents are preſumed to have awakened in the Spectators. By this means, the tone of paſſion would be kept up without interruption; and all the good effects of the antient Chorus might be preſerved, for inſpiring proper ſentiments, and for increaſing the morality of the Performance, without thoſe inconveniences which aroſe from the Chorus forming a conſtituent part of the Play, and mingling unſeaſonably, and unnaturally, with the perſonages of the Drama.

After the view which we have taken of the riſe of Tragedy, and of the nature of the Antient Chorus, with the advantages and inconveniences attending it, our way is cleared for examining, with more advantage, the three Unities of Action, Place, and Time, which have generally been conſidered as eſſential to the proper conduct of the Dramatic Fable.

Of

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Of theſe three, the firſt, Unity of Action, is, beyond doubt, far the moſt important. In treating of Epic Poetry, I have already explained the nature of it; as conſiſting in a relation which all the incidents introduced bear to ſome deſign or effect, ſo as to combine naturally into one whole. This unity of ſubject is ſtill more eſſential to Tragedy, than it is to Epic Poetry. For a multiplicity of Plots, or Actions, crowded into ſo ſhort a ſpace as Tragedy allows, muſt, of neceſſity, diſtract the attention, and prevent paſſion from riſing to any height. Nothing, therefore, is worſe conduct in a Tragic Poet, than to carry on two independent actions in the ſame Play; the effect of which is, that the mind being ſuſpended and divided between them, cannot give itſelf up entirely either to the one or the other. There may, indeed, be underplots; that is, the perſons introduced, may have different purſuits and deſigns; but the Poet's art muſt be ſhown in managing theſe, ſo as to render them ſubſervient to the main action. They ought to be connected with the cataſtrophe of the Play, and to conſpire in bringing it forward. If there be any intrigue which ſtands ſeparate and independent, and which may be left out without affecting the unravelling of the Plot, we may always conclude this to be a faulty violation of Unity. Such Epiſodes are not permitted here, as in Epic Poetry.

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We have a clear example of this defect in Mr. Addiſon's Cato. The ſubject of this Tragedy is, the death of Cato; and a very noble perſonage Cato is, and ſupported by the Author with much dignity. But all the love ſcenes in the Play; the paſſion of Cato's two ſons for Lucia, and that of Juba for Cato's daughter, are mere Epiſodes; have no connection with the principal action, and no effect upon it. The Author thought his ſubject too barren in incidents, and in order to diverſify it, he has given us, as it were, by the bye, a hiſtory of the amours that were going on in Cato's family; by which he hath both broken the unity of his ſubject, and formed a very unſeaſonable junction of gallantry, with the high ſentiments, and public-ſpirited paſſions which predominate in other parts, and which the Play was chiefly deſigned to diſplay.

We muſt take care not to confound the Unity of the Action with the Simplicity of the Plot. Unity, and Simplicity import different things in Dramatic compoſition. The plot is ſaid to be Simple, when a ſmall number of incidents are introduced into it. But it may be implex, as the Critics term it, that is, it may include a conſiderable number of perſons and events, and yet not be deficient in Unity; provided all the incidents be made to tend towards the principal object of the Play, and be properly connected with it. All the Greek Tragedies not only maintain Unity in the Action, but are remarkably

ably ſimple in the Plot; to ſuch a degree, indeed, as ſometimes to appear to us too naked, and deſtitute of intereſting events. In the Œdipus Coloneus, for inſtance, of Sophocles, the whole ſubject is no more than this: Œdipus, blind and miſerable, wanders to Athens, and wiſhes to die there; Creon and his ſon Polynices, arrive at the ſame time, and endeavour, ſeparately, to perſuade the old man to return to Thebes, each with a view to his own intereſt; he will not go; Theſeus, the King of Athens, protects him; and the Play ends with his death. In the Philoctetes of the ſame Author, the Plot, or Fable, is nothing more than Ulyſſes, and the ſon of Achilles, ſtudying to perſuade the diſeaſed Philoctetes to leave his uninhabited iſland, and go with them to Troy; which he refuſes to do, till Hercules, whoſe arrows he poſſeſſed, deſcends from Heaven and commands him. Yet theſe ſimple, and ſeemingly barren ſubjects, are wrought up with ſo much art by Sophocles, as to become very tender and affecting. LECT. XLV.

Among the Moderns, much greater variety of events has been admitted into Tragedy. It has become more the theatre of paſſion than it was among the Antients. A greater diſplay of characters is attempted; more intrigue and action are carried on; our curioſity is more awakened, and more intereſting ſituations ariſe. This variety is, upon the whole, an improvement on Tragedy; it renders the entertainment both more animated and more inſtructive; and when kept

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kept within due bounds, may be perfectly conſiſtent with unity of ſubject. But the Poet muſt, at the ſame time, beware of not deviating too far from ſimplicity in the conſtruction of his Fable. For if he over-charges it with action and intrigue, it becomes perplexed and embarraſſed; and, by conſequence, loſes much of its effect. Congreve's "Mourning Bride," a Tragedy otherwiſe far from being void of merit, fails in this reſpect; and may be given as an inſtance of one ſtanding in perfect oppoſition to the ſimplicity of the antient Plots. The incidents ſucceed one another too rapidly. The Play is too full of buſineſs. It is difficult for the mind to follow and comprehend the whole ſeries of events; and, what is the greateſt fault of all, the cataſtrophe, which ought always to be plain and ſimple, is brought about in a manner too artificial and intricate.

Unity of Action muſt not only be ſtudied in the general conſtruction of the Fable, or Plot, but muſt regulate the ſeveral acts and ſcenes, into which the Play is divided.

The diviſion of every Play, into five acts, has no other foundation than common practice, and the authority of Horace:

Neve minor, neu ſit quinto productior actu
Fabula.——— De Arte Poet.*

* If you would have your Play deſerve ſucceſs,
Give it Five Acts complete, nor more, nor leſs. Francis.

It

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It is a diviſion purely arbitrary. There is nothing in the nature of the Compoſition which fixes this number rather than any other; and it had been much better if no ſuch number had been aſcertained, but every Play had been allowed to divide itſelf into as many parts, or intervals, as the ſubject naturally pointed out. On the Greek Stage, whatever may have been the caſe on the Roman, the diviſion by Acts was totally unknown. The word, Act, never once occurs in Ariſtotle's Poetics, in which he defines exactly every part of the Drama, and divides it into the beginning, the middle, and the end; or, in his own words, into the Prologue, the Epiſode, and the Exode. The Greek Tragedy was, indeed, one continued repreſentation, from beginning to end. The Stage was never empty, nor the curtain let fall. But at certain intervals, when the Actors retired, the Chorus continued and ſung. Neither do theſe Songs of the Chorus divide the Greek Tragedies into five portions, ſimilar to our Acts; though ſome of the Commentators have endeavoured to force them into this office. But it is plain, that the intervals at which the Chorus ſung, are extremely unequal and irregular, ſuited to the occaſion and the ſubject; and would divide the Play ſometimes into three, ſometimes into ſeven or eight Acts*.

As practice has now eſtabliſhed a different plan on the Modern Stage, has divided every

* See the Diſſertation prefixed to Franklin's Tranſlation of Sophocles.

Play

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The Firſt Act ought to contain a clear expoſition of the ſubject. It ought to be ſo managed as to awaken the curioſity of the Spectators; and at the ſame time to furniſh them with materials for underſtanding the ſequel. It ſhould make them acquainted with the perſonages who are to appear, with their ſeveral views and intereſts, and with the ſituation of affairs at the time when the Play commences. A ſtriking Introduction, ſuch as the firſt ſpeech of Almeria, in the Mourning Bride, and that of Lady Randolph, in Douglas, produces a happy effect: but this is what the ſubject will not always admit. In the ruder times of Dramatic Writing, the expoſition of the ſubject was wont to be made by a Prologue, or by a ſingle Actor appearing, and giving full and direct information to the Spectators. Some of Æſchylus's and Euripides's Plays are opened in this manner. But ſuch an introduction is extremely inartificial, and therefore is now totally aboliſhed, and the ſubject made to open itſelf by converſation, among the firſt Actors who are brought upon the Stage.

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During the courſe of the Drama, in the Second, Third, and Fourth Acts, the Plot ſhould gradually thicken. The great object which the Poet ought here to have in view, is, by intereſting us in his ſtory, to keep our paſſions always awake. As ſoon as he allows us to languiſh, there is no more tragic merit. He ſhould, therefore, introduce no perſonages but ſuch as are neceſſary for carrying on the action. He ſhould contrive to place thoſe whom he finds it proper to introduce, in the moſt intereſting ſituations. He ſhould have no ſcenes of idle converſation or mere declamation. The Action of the Play ought to be always advancing, and as it advances, the ſuſpenſe, and the concern of the Spectators, to be raiſed more and more. This is the great excellency of Shakeſpeare, that his ſcenes are full of Sentiment and Action, never of mere diſcourſe; whereas, it is often a fault of the beſt French Tragedians, that they allow the Action to languiſh for the ſake of a long and artful Dialogue. Sentiment, Paſſion, Pity, and Terror, ſhould reign throughout a Tragedy. Every thing ſhould be full of movements. An uſeleſs incident, or an unneceſſary converſation, weakens the intereſt which we take in the Action, and renders us cold and inattentive.

The Fifth Act is the ſeat of the Cataſtrophe, or the unravelling of the Plot, in which we always expect the art and genius of the Poet to be moſt fully diſplayed. The firſt rule concerning it, is, that it be brought about by probable and natural

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natural means. Hence all unravellings which turn upon diſguiſed habits, rencounters by night, miſtakes of one perſon for another, and other ſuch Theatrical and Romantic circumſtances, are to be condemned as faulty. In the next place, the Cataſtrophe ought always to be ſimple; to depend on few events, and to include but few perſons. Paſſion never riſes ſo high when it is divided among many objects, as when it is directed towards one or a few. And it is ſtill more checked, if the incidents be ſo complex and intricate, that the underſtanding is put on the ſtretch to trace them, when the heart ſhould be wholly delivered up to emotion. The Cataſtrophe of the Mourning Bride, as I formerly hinted, offends againſt both theſe rules. In the laſt place, the Cataſtrophe of a Tragedy ought to be the reign of pure ſentiment and paſſion. In proportion as it approaches, every thing ſhould warm and glow. No long diſcourſes; no cold reaſonings; no parade of genius, in the midſt of thoſe ſolemn and awful events, that cloſe ſome of the great revolutions of human fortune. There, if any where, the Poet muſt be ſimple, ſerious, pathetic; and ſpeak no language but that of nature.

The Antients were fond of unravellings, which turned upon what is called, an "Anagnoriſis," or a diſcovery of ſome perſon to be different from what he was taken to be. When ſuch diſcoveries are artfully conducted, and produced in critical ſituations, they are extremely ſtriking? Such as that

that famous one in Sophocles, which makes the whole ſubject of his Œdipus Tyrannus, and which is, undoubtedly, the fulleſt of ſuſpenſe, agitation, and terror, that ever was exhibited on any Stage. Among the Moderns, two of the moſt diſtinguiſhed Anagniriſes, are thoſe contained in Voltaire's Merope and Mr. Home's Douglas: both of which are great maſter-pieces of the kind. LECT. XLV.

It is not eſſential to the cataſtrophe of a Tragedy, that it ſhould end unhappily. In the courſe of the Play there may be ſufficient agitation and diſtreſs, and many tender emotions raiſed by the ſufferings and dangers of the virtuous, though, in the end, good men are rendered ſucceſsful. The Tragic ſpirit, therefore, does not want ſcope upon this ſyſtem; and accordingly, the Athalie of Racine, and ſome of Voltaire's fineſt Plays, ſuch as Alzire, Merope, and the Orphan of China, with ſome few Engliſh Tragedies, likewiſe, have a fortunate concluſion. But, in general, the ſpirit of Tragedy, eſpecially of Engliſh Tragedy, leans more to the ſide of leaving the impreſſion of virtuous ſorrow full and ſtrong upon the heart.

A QUESTION, intimately connected with this ſubject, and which has employed the ſpeculations of ſeveral philoſophical Critics, naturally occurs here: How it comes to paſs that thoſe emotions of ſorrow which Tragedy excites, afford any gratification to the mind? For, is not ſorrow,

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in its nature, a painful paſſion? Is not real diſtreſs often occaſioned to the Spectators, by the Dramatic Repreſentations at which they aſſiſt? Do we not ſee their tears flow? and yet, while the impreſſion of what they have ſuffered remains upon their minds, they again aſſemble in crowds, to renew the ſame diſtreſſes. The queſtion is not without difficulty, and various ſolutions of it have been propoſed by ingenious men *. The moſt plain and ſatisfactory account of the matter, appears to me to be the following. By the wiſe and gracious conſtitution of our nature, the exerciſe of all the ſocial paſſions is attended with pleaſure. Nothing is more pleaſing and grateful, than love and friendſhip. Wherever man takes a ſtrong intereſt in the concerns of his fellow creatures, an internal ſatisfaction is made to accompany the feeling. Pity, or compaſſion, in particular, is, for wiſe ends, appointed to be one of the ſtrongeſt inſtincts of our frame, and is attended with a peculiar attractive power. It is an affection which cannot but be productive of ſome diſtreſs, on account of the ſympathy with the ſufferers, which it neceſſarily involves. But, as it includes benevolence and friendſhip, it partakes, at the ſame

* See Dr. Campbell's Philoſophy of Rhetoric, Book I. ch. xi. where an account is given of the hypotheſes of different Critics on this ſubject; and where one is propoſed, with which, in the main, I agree. — See alſo Lord Kaimes's Eſſays on the Principles of Morality, Eſſay I. And Mr. David Hume's Eſſay on Tragedy.

time,

time, of the agreeable and pleaſing nature of thoſe affections. The heart is warmed by kindneſs and humanity, at the ſame moment at which it is afflicted by the diſtreſſes of thoſe with whom it ſympathiſes: and the pleaſure ariſing from thoſe kind emotions, prevails ſo much in the mixture, and ſo far counterbalances the pain, as to render the ſtate of the mind, upon the whole, agreeable. At the ſame time, the immediate pleaſure, which always goes along with the operation of the benevolent and ſympathetic affections, derives an addition from the approbation of our own minds. We are pleaſed with ourſelves for feeling as we ought, and for entering, with proper ſorrow, into the concerns of the afflicted. In Tragedy, beſides, other adventitious circumſtances concur to diminiſh the painful part of Sympathy, and to increaſe the ſatisfaction attending it. We are, in ſome meaſure, relieved, by thinking that the cauſe of our diſtreſs is feigned, not real; and we are alſo gratified by the charms of Poetry, the propriety of Sentiment and Language, and the beauty of Action. From the concurrence of theſe cauſes, the pleaſure which we receive from Tragedy, notwithſtanding the diſtreſs it occaſions, ſeems to me to be accounted for in a ſatisfactory manner. At the ſame time, it is to be obſerved, that, as there is always a mixture of pain in the pleaſure, that pain is capable of being ſo much heightened, by the repreſentation of incidents extremely direful, as to ſhock our feelings, and to render us averſe, either to the reading of ſuch

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LECT. XLV. Tragedies, or to the beholding of them upon the Stage.

HAVING now ſpoken of the conduct of the ſubject throughout the Acts, it is alſo neceſſary to take notice of the conduct of the ſeveral Scenes which make up the Acts of a Play.

THE entrance of a new perſonage upon the Stage, forms, what is called, a New Scene. Theſe Scenes, or ſucceſſive converſations, ſhould be cloſely linked and connected with each other; and much of the Art of Dramatic Compoſition is ſhown in maintaining this connection. Two rules are neceſſary to be obſerved for this purpoſe.

THE firſt is, that, during the courſe of one Act, the Stage ſhould never be left vacant, though but for a ſingle moment; that is, all the perſons who have appeared in one Scene, or converſation, ſhould never go off together, and be ſucceeded by a new ſet of perſons appearing in the next Scene, independent of the former. This makes a gap, or total interruption in the repreſentation, which, in effect, puts an end to that Act. For whenever the Stage is evacuated, the Act is cloſed. This rule is, very generally, obſerved by the French Tragedians; but the Engliſh Writers, both of Comedy and Tragedy, ſeldom pay any regard to it. Their perſonages ſucceed one another upon the Stage with ſo little connection; the union of their Scenes is ſo much broken,

broken, that, with equal propriety, their Plays might be divided into ten or twelve Acts as into five. LECT. XLV.

The ſecond rule, which the Engliſh Writers alſo obſerve little better than the former, is, that no perſon ſhall come upon the Stage, or leave it, without a reaſon appearing to us, both for the one and the other. Nothing is more awkward, and contrary to art, than for an Actor to enter, without our ſeeing any cauſe for his appearing in that Scene, except that it was for the Poet's purpoſe he ſhould enter preciſely at ſuch a moment; or for an Actor to go away without any reaſon for his retiring; farther than that the Poet had no more ſpeeches to put into his mouth. This is managing the Perſonæ Dramatis exactly like ſo many puppets, who are moved by wires, to anſwer the call of the maſter of the ſhow. Whereas the perfection of Dramatic Writing requires that every thing ſhould be conducted in imitation, as near as poſſible, of ſome real tranſaction; where we are let into the ſecret of all that is paſſing; where we behold perſons before us always buſy; ſee them coming and going; and know perfectly whence they come and whither they go, and about what they are employed.

All that I have hitherto ſaid, relates to the Unity of the Dramatic Action. In order to render the Unity of Action more complete, Critics have added the other two Unities of

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Time and Place. The ſtrict obſervance of theſe is more difficult, and, perhaps, not ſo neceſſary. The Unity of Place requires, that the Scene ſhould never be ſhifted; but that the Action of the play ſhould be continued to the end, in the ſame place where it is ſuppoſed to begin. The Unity of Time, ſtrictly taken, requires, that the time of the Action be no longer than the time that is allowed for the Repreſentation of the Play; though Ariſtotle ſeems to have given the Poet a little more liberty and permitted the action to comprehend the whole time of one day.

The intention of both theſe rules is, to overcharge, as little as poſſible, the imagination of the Spectators with improbable circumſtances in the acting of the Play, and to bring the imitation more cloſe to reality. We muſt obſerve, that the nature of Dramatic Exhibitions upon the Greek Stage, ſubjected the Antient Tragedians to a more ſtrict Obſervance of theſe Unities than is neceſſary in Modern Theatres. I ſhewed, that a Greek Tragedy was one uninterrupted repreſentation, from beginning to end. There was no diviſion of Acts; no pauſes or interval between them; but the Stage was continually full; occupied either by the Actors, or the Chorus. Hence, no room was left for the imagination to go beyond the preciſe time and place of the repreſentation; any more than is allowed during the continuance of one Act, on the Modern Theatre.

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But the practice of ſuſpending the ſpectacle totally for ſome little time between the Acts, has made a great and material change; gives more latitude to the imagination, and renders the antient ſtrict confinement to time and place leſs neceſſary. While the acting of the Play is interrupted, the Spectator can, without any great or violent effort, ſuppoſe a few hours to paſs between every act; or can ſuppoſe himſelf moved from one apartment of a palace, or one part of a city to another: and, therefore, too ſtrict an obſervance of theſe Unities ought not to be preferred to higher beauties of execution, nor to the introduction of more pathetic ſituations, which ſometimes cannot be accompliſhed in any other way, than by the tranſgreſſion of theſe rules.

On the Antient Stage, we plainly ſee the Poets ſtruggling with many an inconvenience, in order to preſerve thoſe Unities which were then ſo neceſſary. As the Scene could never be ſhifted, they were obliged to make it always lie in ſome court of a palace, or ſome public area, to which all the perſons concerned in the action might have equal acceſs. This led to frequent improbabilities, by repreſenting things as tranſacted there, which naturally ought to have been tranſacted before few witneſſes, and in private apartments. The like improbabilities aroſe, from limiting themſelves ſo much in point of time. Incidents were unnaturally crowded; and it is eaſy to point out ſeveral inſtances in the Greek Tragedies, where events are ſuppoſed to paſs

LECT. XLV. during a Song of the Chorus, which muſt neceſſarily have employed many hours.

But though it ſeems neceſſary to ſet Modern Poets free from a ſtrict obſervance of theſe Dramatic Unities, yet we muſt remember there are certain bounds to this liberty. Frequent and wild changes of time and place; hurrying the Spectator from one diſtant city, or country to another; or making ſeveral days or weeks to paſs during the courſe of the Repreſentation, are liberties which ſhock the imagination, which give to the performance a romantic and unnatural appearance, and, therefore, cannot be allowed in any Dramatic Writer, who aſpires to correctneſs. In particular, we muſt remember, that it is only between the Acts, that any liberty can be given for going beyond the Unities of Time and Place. During the courſe of each Act, they ought to be ſtrictly obſerved; that is, during each Act the Scene ſhould continue the ſame, and no more time ſhould be ſuppoſed to paſs, than is employed in the repreſentation of that act. This is a rule which the French Tragedians regularly obſerve. To violate this rule, as is too often done by the Engliſh; to change the Place, and ſhift the Scene, in the midſt of one Act, ſhews great incorrectneſs, and deſtroys the whole intention of the diviſion of a Play into Acts. Mr. Addiſon's Cato is remarkable, beyond moſt Engliſh Tragedies, for regularity of conduct. The Author has limited himſelf, in time, to a ſingle day; and in place, has maintained

tained the moſt rigorous Unity. The Scene is never changed; and the whole action paſſes in the hall of Cato's houſe, at Utica. LECT. XLV.

In general, the nearer a Poet can bring the Dramatic Repreſentation, in all its circumſtances, to an imitation of nature and real life, the impreſſion which he makes on us will always be the more perfect. Probability, as I obſerved at the beginning of the lecture, is highly eſſential to the conduct of the Tragic Action, and we are always hurt by the want of it. It is this that makes the obſervance of the Dramatic Unities to be of conſequence, as far as they can be obſerved, without ſacrificing more material beauties. It is not, as has been ſometimes ſaid, that by the preſervation of the Unities of Time and Place, Spectators are deceived into a belief of the reality of the objects which are ſet before them on the Stage; and that, when thoſe Unities are violated, the charm is broken, and they diſcover the whole to be a fiction. No ſuch deception as this can ever be accompliſhed. No one ever imagines himſelf to be at Athens, or Rome, when a Greek or Roman ſubject is preſented on the Stage. He knows the whole to be an imitation only: but he requires that imitation to be conducted with ſkill and veriſimilitude. His pleaſure, the entertainment which he expects, the intereſt which he is to take in the Story, all depend on its being ſo conducted. His imagination, therefore, ſeeks to aid the imitation, and to reſt on the probability; and the Poet, who ſhocks

LECT. XLV. ſhocks him by improbable circumſtances, and by awkward, unſkilful imitation, deprives him of his pleaſure, and leaves him hurt and diſpleaſed. This is the whole myſtery of the theatrical illuſion.

LECTURE XLVI.

TRAGEDY.—GREEK—FRENCH—ENGLISH TRAGEDY.

HAVING treated of the Dramatic Action in Tragedy, I proceed next to treat of the Characters moſt proper to be exhibited. It has been thought, by ſeveral Critics, that the nature of Tragedy requires the principal perſonages to be always of illuſtrious character, and of high or princely rank; whoſe misfortunes and ſufferings, it is ſaid, take faſter hold of the imagination, and impreſs the heart more forcibly than ſimilar events, happening to perſons in private life. But this is more ſpecious than ſolid. It is refuted by facts. For the diſtreſſes of Deſdemona, Monimia, and Belvidera, intereſt us as deeply as if they had been princeſſes or queens. The dignity of Tragedy does, indeed, require, that there ſhould be nothing degrading or mean, in the circumſtances of the perſons which it exhibits; but it requires nothing more. Their high rank may render the ſpectacle

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ſpectacle more ſplendid, and the ſubject ſeemingly of more importance, but conduces very little to its being intereſting or pathetic; which depends entirely on the nature of the Tale, on the art of the Poet in conducting it, and on the ſentiments to which it gives occaſion. In every rank of life, the relations of Father, Huſband, Son, Brother, Lover, or Friend, lay the foundation of thoſe affecting ſituations, which make man's heart feel for man.

The moral characters of the perſons repreſented, are of much greater conſequence than the external circumſtances in which the Poet places them. Nothing, indeed, in the conduct of Tragedy, demands a Poet's attention more, than ſo to deſcribe his perſonages, and ſo to order the incidents which relate to them, as ſhall leave upon the Spectators, impreſſions favourable to virtue, and to the adminiſtration of Providence. It is not neceſſary, for this end, that poetical juſtice, as it is called, ſhould be obſerved in the cataſtrophe of the Piece. This has been long exploded from Tragedy; the end of which is, to affect us with pity for the virtuous in diſtreſs, and to afford a probable repreſentation of the ſtate of human life, where calamities often befal the beſt, and a mixed portion of good and evil is appointed for all. But, withal, the Author muſt beware of ſhocking our minds with ſuch repreſentations of life as tend to raiſe horror, or to render virtue an object of averſion. Though innocent perſons ſuffer, their ſufferings

ſufferings ought to be attended with ſuch circumſtances, as ſhall make virtue appear amiable and venerable; and ſhall render their condition, on the whole, preferable to that of bad men, who have prevailed againſt them. The ſtings, and the remorſe of guilt, muſt ever be repreſented as productive of greater miſeries, than any that the bad can bring upon the good.

Aristotle's obſervations on the characters proper for Tragedy, are very judicious. He is of opinion, that perfect unmixed characters, either of good or ill men, are not the fitteſt to be introduced. The diſtreſſes of the one being wholly unmerited, hurt and ſhock us; and the ſufferings of the other occaſion no pity. Mixed characters, ſuch as in fact we meet with in the world, afford the moſt proper field for diſplaying, without any bad effect on morals, the viciſſitudes of life; and they intereſt us the more deeply, as they diſplay emotions and paſſions which we have all been conſcious of. When ſuch perſons fall into diſtreſs through the vices of others, the ſubject may be very pathetic; but it is always more inſtructive, when a perſon has been himſelf the cauſe of his misfortune, and when his misfortune is occaſioned by the violence of paſſion, or by ſome weakneſs incident to human nature. Such ſubjects both diſpoſe us to the deepeſt ſympathy, and adminiſter uſeful warnings to us for our own conduct.

Upon

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Upon theſe principles, it ſurpriſes me that the ſtory of Œdipus ſhould have been ſo much celebrated by all the Critics, as one of the fitteſt ſubjects for Tragedy; and ſo often brought upon the Stage, not by Sophocles only, but by Corneille alſo, and Voltaire. An innocent perſon, one, in the main, of a virtuous character, through no crime of his own, nay not by the vices of others, but through mere fatality and blind chance, is involved in the greateſt of all human miſeries. In a caſual rencounter he kills his father, without knowing him; he afterwards is married to his own mother; and diſcovering himſelf in the end to have committed both parricide and inceſt, he becomes frantic, and dies in the utmoſt miſery. Such a ſubject excites horror rather than pity. As it is conducted by Sophocles, it is indeed extremely affecting; but it conveys no inſtruction; it awakens in the mind no tender ſympathy; it leaves no impreſſion favourable to virtue or humanity.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the ſubjects of the antient Greek Tragedies were too often founded on mere deſtiny and inevitable misfortunes. They were too much mixed with their tales about oracles, and the vengeance of the Gods, which led to many an incident ſufficiently melancholy and tragical; but rather purely tragical, than uſeful or moral. Hence, both the Œdipus's of Sophocles, the Iphigenia in Aulis, the Hecuba of Euripides, and ſeveral of the like kind. In the courſe of the Drama,

many moral ſentiments occurred. But the inſtruction, which the Fable of the Play conveyed, ſeldom was any more, than that reverence was owing to the Gods, and ſubmiſſion due to the decrees of Deſtiny. Modern Tragedy has aimed at a higher object, by becoming more the theatre of paſſion; pointing out to men the conſequences of their own miſconduct; ſhowing the direful effects which ambition, jealouſy, love, reſentment, and other ſuch ſtrong emotions, when miſguided, or left unreſtrained, produce upon human life. An Othello, hurried by jealouſy to murder his innocent wife; a Jaffier, enſnared by reſentment and want, to engage in a conſpiracy, and then ſtung with remorſe, and involved in ruin; a Siffredi, through the deceit which he employs for public-ſpirited ends, bringing deſtruction on all whom he loved; a Caliſta, ſeduced into a criminal intrigue, which overwhelms herſelf, her father, and all her friends in miſery; theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the examples which Tragedy now diſplays to public view; and by means of which, it inculcates on men the proper government of their paſſions.

Of all the paſſions which furniſh matter to Tragedy, that which has moſt occupied the Modern Stage is Love. To the Antient Theatre, it was in a manner wholly unknown. In few of their Tragedies is it ever mentioned; and I remember no more than one which turns upon it, the Hippolitus of Euripides. This was owing to

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to the national manners of the Greeks, and to that greater ſeparation of the two ſexes from one another, than has taken place in modern times; aided too, perhaps, by this circumſtance, that no female actors ever appeared on the Antient Stage. But though no reaſon appears for the total excluſion of Love from the Theatre, yet with what juſtice or propriety it has uſurped ſo much place, as to be in a manner the ſole hinge of Modern Tragedy, may be much queſtioned. Voltaire, who is no leſs eminent as a Critic than as a Poet, declares loudly and ſtrongly againſt this predominancy of Love, as both degrading the majeſty, and confining the natural limits of Tragedy. And aſſuredly, the mixing of it perpetually with all the great and ſolemn revolutions of human fortune which belong to the Tragic Stage, tends to give Tragedy too much the air of gallantry, and juvenile entertainment. The Athalie of Racine, the Meropé of Voltaire, the Douglas of Mr. Home, are ſufficient proofs, that without any aſſiſtance from Love, the Drama is capable of producing its higheſt effects upon the mind.

This ſeems to be clear, that wherever Love is introduced into Tragedy, it ought to reign in it, and to give riſe to the principal action. It ought to be that ſort of Love which poſſeſſes all the force and majeſty of paſſion; and which occaſions great and important conſequences. For nothing can have a worſe effect, or be more debaſing

debaſing to Tragedy, than, together with the manly and heroic paſſions, to mingle a trifling love intrigue, as a ſort of ſeaſoning to the Play. The bad effects of this are ſufficiently conſpicuous both in the Cato of Mr. Addiſon, as I had occaſion before to remark, and in the Iphigenie of Racine. LECT. XLVI.

After a Tragic Poet has arranged his ſubject, and choſen his perſonages, the next thing he muſt attend to, is the propriety of ſentiments; that they be perfectly ſuited to the characters of thoſe perſons to whom they are attributed, and to the ſituations in which they are placed. The neceſſity of obſerving this general rule is ſo obvious, that I need not inſiſt upon it. It is principally in the pathetic parts, that both the difficulty and the importance of it are the greateſt. Tragedy is the region of paſſion. We come to it, expecting to be moved; and let the Poet be ever ſo judicious in his conduct, moral in his intentions, and elegant in his Style, yet if he fails in the pathetic, he has no tragic merit, we return cold and diſappointed from the performance, and never deſire to meet with it more.

To paint paſſion ſo truly and juſtly as to ſtrike the hearts of the hearers with full ſympathy, is a prerogative of genius given to few. It requires ſtrong and ardent ſenſibility of mind. It requires the Author to have the power of entering

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tering deeply into the characters which he draws; of becoming for a moment the very perſon whom he exhibits, and of aſſuming all his feelings. For, as I have often had occaſion to obſerve, there is no poſſibility of ſpeaking properly the language of any paſſion, without feeling it; and it is to the abſence or deadneſs of real emotion, that we muſt aſcribe the want of ſucceſs in ſo many Tragic Writers, when they attempt being pathetic.

No man, for inſtance, when he is under the ſtrong agitations of anger or grief, or any ſuch violent paſſion, ever thinks of deſcribing to another what his feelings at that time are; or of telling them what he reſembles. This never was, and never will be, the language of any perſon, when he is deeply moved. It is the language of one who deſcribes coolly the condition of that perſon to another; or it is the language of the paſſionate perſon himſelf, after his emotion has ſubſided, relating what his ſituation was in the moments of paſſion. Yet this ſort of ſecondary deſcription is what Tragic Poets too often give us, inſtead of the native and primary language of paſſion. Thus, in Mr. Addiſon's Cato, when Lucia confeſſes to Portius her love for him, but, at the ſame time, ſwears with the greateſt ſolemnity, that in the preſent ſituation of their country ſhe will never marry him, Portius receives this unexpected ſentence with the utmoſt aſtoniſhment and grief; at leaſt the

Poet wants to make us believe that he ſo received it. How does he expreſs theſe feelings? LECT. XLVI.

> Fix'd in aſtoniſhment, I gaze upon thee,
> Like one juſt blaſted by a ſtroke from Heav'n,
> Who pants for breath, and ſtiffens yet alive
> In dreadful looks; a monument of wrath.

This makes his whole reply to Lucia. Now did any perſon, who was of a ſudden aſtoniſhed and overwhelmed with ſorrow, ever, ſince the creation of the world, expreſs himſelf in this manner? This is indeed an excellent deſcription to be given us by another, of a perſon who was in ſuch a ſituation. Nothing would have been more proper for a by-ſtander, recounting this conference, than to have ſaid,

> Fix'd in aſtoniſhment, he gaz'd upon her,
> Like one juſt blaſted by a ſtroke from Heav'n,
> Who pants for breath, &c.

But the perſon, who is himſelf concerned, ſpeaks, on ſuch an occaſion, in a very different manner. He gives vent to his feelings; he pleads for pity; he dwells upon the cauſe of his grief and aſtoniſhment; but never thinks of deſcribing his own perſon and looks, and ſhowing us, by a ſimile, what he reſembles. Such repreſentations of paſſions are no better in Poetry, than it would be in painting, to make a label iſſue from the mouth of a figure, bidding us remark, that this figure repreſents an aſtoniſhed, or a grieved perſon.

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On ſome other occaſions, when Poets do not employ this ſort of deſcriptive language in paſſion, they are too apt to run into forced and unnatural thoughts, in order to exaggerate the feelings of perſons, whom they would paint as very ſtrongly moved. When Oſmyn, in the Mourning Bride, after parting with Almeria, regrets in a long ſoliloquy, that his eyes only ſee objects that are preſent, and cannot ſee Almeria after ſhe is gone; when Jane Shore, in Mr. Rowe's Tragedy, on meeting with her huſband in her extreme diſtreſs, and finding that he had forgiven her, calls on the rains to give her their drops, and the ſprings to give her their ſtreams, that ſhe may never want a ſupply of tears; in ſuch paſſages, we ſee very plainly that it is neither Oſmyn, nor Jane Shore, that ſpeak; but the Poet himſelf in his own perſon, who, inſtead of aſſuming the feelings of thoſe whom he means to exhibit, and ſpeaking as they would have done in ſuch ſituations, is ſtraining his fancy, and ſpurring up his genius to ſay ſomething that ſhall be uncommonly ſtrong and lively.

If we attend to the language that is ſpoken by perſons under the influence of real paſſion, we ſhall find it always plain and ſimple; abounding indeed with thoſe figures which expreſs a diſturbed and impetuous ſtate of mind, ſuch as interrogations, exclamations, and apoſtrophes; but never employing thoſe which belong to the mere embelliſhment and parade of Speech. We never

never meet with any ſubtilty or refinement, in the ſentiments of real paſſion. The thoughts which paſſion ſuggeſts, are always plain and obvious ones, ariſing directly from its object. Paſſion never reaſons, nor ſpeculates, till its ardour begins to cool. It never leads to long diſcourſe or declamation. On the contrary, it expreſſes itſelf moſt commonly in ſhort, broken, and interrupted Speeches; correſponding to the violent and deſultory emotions of the mind.

When we examine the French Tragedians by theſe principles, which ſeem clearly founded in nature, we find them often deficient. Though in many parts of Tragic Compoſition, they have great merit; though in exciting ſoft and tender emotions, ſome of them are very ſucceſsful; yet in the high and ſtrong pathetic, they generally fail. Their paſſionate Speeches too often run into long declamation. There is too much reaſoning and refinement; too much pomp and ſtudied beauty in them. They rather convey a feeble impreſſion of paſſion, than awaken any ſtrong ſympathy in the Reader's mind.

Sophocles and Euripides are much more ſucceſsful in this part of Compoſition. In their pathetic ſcenes, we find no unnatural refinement; no exaggerated thoughts. They ſet before us the plain and direct feelings of nature, in ſimple expreſſive language; and therefore, on great

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occaſions, they ſeldom fail of touching the heart*. This too is Shakeſpeare's great excellency; and to this it is principally owing, that his dramatic productions, notwithſtanding their many imperfections, have been ſo long the favourites of the Public. He is more faithful to the true language of nature, in the midſt of paſſion, than any Writer. He gives us this language, unadulterated by art; and more inſtances of it can be quoted from him than from all other Tragic Poets taken together. I ſhall refer only to that admirable ſcene in Macbeth, where Macduff receives the account of his wife and all his children being ſlaughtered in his abſence. The emotions, firſt of grief, and then of the moſt fierce reſentment riſing againſt Macbeth, are painted in ſuch a manner that there is no heart but muſt feel them, and no fancy can conceive any thing more expreſſive of Nature.

With regard to moral ſentiments and reflections in Tragedies, it is clear that they muſt not

* Nothing, for inſtance, can be more touching and pathetic than the addreſs which Medea, in Euripides, makes to her children, when ſhe had formed the reſolution of putting them to death: and nothing more natural, than the conflict which ſhe is deſcribed as ſuffering within herſelf on that occaſion:

Φευ, Φευ· τι προσδεξκεσθε μ· ομμασιν τεκνα;
Τι προσγελατε τον πανυστατον γελων;
Αι, αι· τι δρασω; καρδια γαρ ωχεται·
Γυναικες, ὁμμα φαιδρον ως ειδον τεκνων
Ουκ ἀν δυναιμην. χαιρετω βελευματα, &c.

Eur. Med. L. 1040.

recur

recur too often. They loſe their effect, when unſeaſonably crowded. They render the Play pedantic and declamatory. This is remarkably the caſe with thoſe Latin Tragedies which go under the name of Seneca, which are little more than a collection of declamations and moral ſentences, wrought up with a quaint brilliancy, which ſuited the prevailing taſte of that age.

I AM not, however, of opinion, that moral reflections ought to be altogether omitted in Tragedies. When properly introduced, they give dignity to the Compoſition, and, on many occaſions, they are extremely natural. When Perſons are under any uncommon diſtreſs, when they are beholding in others, or experiencing in themſelves, the viciſſitudes of human fortune; indeed, when they are placed in any of the great and trying ſituations of life, ſerious and moral reflections naturally occur to them, whether they be perſons of much virtue or not. Almoſt every human being is, on ſuch occaſions, diſpoſed to be ſerious. It is then the natural tone of the mind; and therefore no Tragic poet ſhould omit ſuch proper opportunities, when they occur, for favouring the intereſts of virtue. Cardinal Wolſey's ſoliloquy upon his fall, for inſtance, in Shakeſpeare, when he bids a long farewell to all his greatneſs, and the advices which he afterwards gives to Cromwell, are, in his ſituation extremely natural; touch and pleaſe all Readers; and are at once inſtructive and affecting. Much of the merit

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of Mr. Addiſon's Cato depends upon that moral turn of thought which diſtinguiſhes it. I have had occaſion, both in this Lecture and in the preceding one, to take notice of ſome of its defects; and certainly neither for warmth of paſſion nor proper conduct of the plot, is it at all eminent. It does not, however, follow, that it is deſtitute of merit. For, by the purity and beauty of the language, by the dignity of Cato's character, by that ardour of public ſpirit, and thoſe virtuous ſentiments of which it is full, it has always commanded high regard; and has, both in our own country and among foreigners, acquired no ſmall reputation.

The Style and Verſification of Tragedy ought to be free, eaſy, and varied. Our blank verſe is happily ſuited to this purpoſe. It has ſufficient majeſty for raiſing the Style; it can deſcend to the ſimple and familiar; it is ſuſceptible of great variety of cadence; and is quite free from the conſtraint and monotony of rhyme. For monotony is, above all things, to be avoided by a Tragic Poet. If he maintains every where the ſame ſtatelineſs of Style, if he uniformly keeps up the ſame run of meaſure and harmony in his Verſe, he cannot fail of becoming inſipid. He ſhould not indeed ſink into flat and careleſs lines; his Style ſhould always have force and dignity, but not the uniform dignity of Epic Poetry. It ſhould aſſume that briſkneſs and eaſe which is ſuited to the freedom of dialogue, and the fluctuations of paſſion.

One

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One of the greateſt misfortunes of the French Tragedy is, its being always written in rhyme. The nature of the French language, indeed, requires this, in order to diſtinguiſh the Style from mere Proſe. But it fetters the freedom of the Tragic Dialogue, fills it with a languid monotony, and is, in a manner, fatal to the high ſtrength and power of paſſion. Voltaire maintains, that the difficulty of compoſing in French Rhyme, is one great cauſe of the pleaſure which the Audience receives from the Compoſition. Tragedy would be ruined, ſays he, if we were to write it in Blank Verſe; take away the difficulty, and you take away the whole merit. A ſtrange idea! as if the entertainment of the Audience aroſe, not from the emotions which the Poet is ſucceſsful in awakening, but from a reflection on the toil which he endured in his cloſet, from aſſorting male and female Rhymes. With regard to thoſe ſplendid compariſons in Rhyme, and ſtrings of couplets, with which it was, ſome time ago, faſhionable for our Engliſh Poets to conclude, not only every act of a Tragedy, but ſometimes alſo the moſt intereſting Scenes, nothing need be ſaid, but that they were the moſt perfect barbariſms; childiſh ornaments, introduced to pleaſe a falſe taſte in the Audience; and now univerſally laid aſide.

Having thus treated of all the different parts of Tragedy, I ſhall conclude the ſubject, with a ſhort view of the Greek, the French, and the Engliſh

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Engliſh Stage, and with obſervations on the principal Writers.

Most of the diſtinguiſhing characters of the Greek Tragedy have been already occaſionally mentioned. It was embelliſhed with the Lyric Poetry of the Chorus, of the origin of which, and of the advantages and diſadvantages attending it, I treated fully in the preceding Lecture. The Plot was always exceedingly ſimple. It admitted of few incidents. It was conducted, with a very exact regard to the unities of action, time, and place. Machinery, or the intervention of the Gods, was employed; and, which is very faulty, the final unravelling ſometimes made to turn upon it. Love, except in one or two inſtances, was never admitted into the Greek Tragedy. Their ſubjects were often founded on deſtiny, or inevitable misfortunes. A vein of religious and moral ſentiment always runs through them; but they made leſs uſe than the Moderns of the combat of the paſſions, and of the diſtreſſes which our paſſions bring upon us. Their Plots were all taken from the antient traditionary ſtories of their own nations. Hercules furniſhes matter for two Tragedies. The hiſtory of Œdipus, King of Thebes, and his unfortunate family, for ſix. The war of Troy, with its conſequences, for no fewer than ſeventeen. There is only one of later date than this; which is the Perſæ, or expedition of Xerxes, by Æſchylus.

ÆSCHYLUS

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Æschylus is the Father of the Greek Tragedy, and exhibits both the beauties, and the defects, of an early original Writer. He is bold, nervous, and animated; but very obſcure and difficult to be underſtood; partly by reaſon of the incorrect ſtate in which we have his works (they having ſuffered more by time, than any of the Antient Tragedians), and partly on account of the nature of his Style, which is crowded with metaphors, often harſh and tumid. He abounds with martial ideas and deſcriptions. He has much fire and elevation; leſs of tenderneſs, than of force. He delights in the marvellous. The Ghoſt of Darius in the Perſæ, the Inſpiration of Caſſandra in Agamemnon, and the Songs of the Furies in the Eumenides, are beautiful in their kind, and ſtrongly expreſſive of his genius.

Sophocles is the moſt maſterly of the three Greek Tragedians; the moſt correct in the conduct of his ſubjects; the moſt juſt and ſublime in his ſentiments. He is eminent for his deſcriptive talent. The relation of the death of Œdipus, in his Œdipus Coloneus, and of the death of Hæmon and Antigone, in his Antigone, are perfect patterns of deſcription to Tragic Poets. Euripides is eſteemed more tender than Sophocles; and he is fuller of moral ſentiments. But, in the conduct of his plays, he is more incorrect and negligent; his expoſitions, or openings of the ſubject, are made in a leſs artful manner; and the Songs of his Chorus, though remarkably

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remarkably poetical, have, commonly, leſs connection with the main action, than thoſe of Sophocles. Both Euripides and Sophocles, however, have very high merit as Tragic Poets. They are elegant and beautiful in their Style; juſt, for the moſt part, in their thoughts; they ſpeak with the voice of nature; and, making allowance for the difference of antient and modern ideas, in the midſt of all their ſimplicity, they are touching and intereſting.

The circumſtances of theatrical repreſentation on the ſtages of Greece and Rome, were, in ſeveral reſpects, very ſingular, and widely different from what obtains among us. Not only were the Songs of the Chorus accompanied with inſtrumental muſic, but as the Abbé de Bos, in his Reflections on Poetry and Painting, has proved, with much curious erudition, the dialogue part had alſo a modulation of its own, which was capable of being ſet to notes; it was carried on in a ſort of recitative between the actors, and was ſupported by inſtruments. He has farther attempted to prove, but the proof ſeems more incomplete, that on ſome occaſions, on the Roman ſtage, the pronouncing and geſticulating parts were divided; that one actor ſpoke, and another performed the geſtures and motions correſponding to what the firſt ſaid. The actors in Tragedy wore a long robe, called Syrma, which flowed upon the Stage. They were raiſed upon Cothurni, which rendered their ſtature uncommonly high; and they always

played in maſques. Theſe maſques were like helmets, which covered the whole head; the mouths of them were ſo contrived as to give an artificial ſound to the voice, in order to make it be heard over their vaſt theatres; and the viſage was ſo formed and painted, as to ſuit the age, characters, or diſpoſitions of the perſons repreſented. When, during the courſe of one Scene, different emotions were to appear in the ſame perſon, the maſque is ſaid to have been ſo painted, that the Actor, by turning one or other profile of his face to the Spectators, expreſſed the change of the ſituation. This, however, was a contrivance attended with many diſadvantages. The maſque muſt have deprived the ſpectators of all the pleaſure which ariſes from the natural animated expreſſion of the eye, and the countenance; and, joined with the other circumſtances which I have mentioned, is apt to give us but an unfavourable idea of the dramatic repreſentations of the Antients. In defence of them it muſt, at the ſame time, be remembered, that their theatres were vaſtly more extenſive in the area than ours, and filled with immenſe crowds. They were always uncovered, and expoſed to the open air. The actors were beheld at a much greater diſtance, and of courſe much more imperfectly by the bulk of the Spectators, which both rendered their looks of leſs conſequence, and might make it in ſome degree neceſſary that their features ſhould be exaggerated, the ſound of their voices enlarged, and their whole appearance magnified beyond

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beyond the life, in order to make the ſtronger impreſſion. It is certain, that, as dramatic Spectacles were the favourite entertainments of the Greeks and Romans, the attention given to their proper exhibition, and the magnificence of the apparatus beſtowed on their theatres, far exceeded any thing that has been attempted in modern ages.

In the Compoſitions of ſome of the French Dramatic Writers, particularly Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, Tragedy has appeared with much luſtre and dignity. They muſt be allowed to have improved upon the Antients, in introducing more incidents, a greater variety of paſſions, a fuller diſplay of characters, and in rendering the ſubject thereby more intereſting. They have ſtudied to imitate the antient models in regularity of conduct. They are attentive to all the unities, and to all the decorums of ſentiment and morality; and their Style is, generally, very poetical and elegant. What an Engliſh taſte is moſt apt to cenſure, in them, is the want of fervour, ſtrength, and the natural language of paſſion. There is often too much converſation in their pieces, inſtead of action. They are too declamatory, as was before obſerved, when they ſhould be paſſionate; too refined, when they ſhould be ſimple. Voltaire freely acknowledges theſe defects of the French Theatre. He admits, that their beſt Tragedies do not make a ſufficient impreſſion on the heart; that the gallantry which reigns in them, and the long fine-ſpun dialogue

dialogue with which they over-abound, frequently ſpread a languor over them; that the Authors ſeemed to be afraid of being too tragic; and very candidly gives it as his judgment, that an union of the vehemence and the action, which characteriſe the Engliſh Theatre, with the correctneſs and decorum of the French Theatre, would be neceſſary to form a perfect Tragedy.

Corneille, who is properly the Father of French Tragedy, is diſtinguiſhed by the majeſty and grandeur of his ſentiments, and the fruitfulneſs of his imagination. His genius was unqueſtionably very rich, but ſeemed more turned towards the Epic than the Tragic vein; for, in general, he is magnificent and ſplendid, rather than tender and touching. He is the moſt declamatory of all the French Tragedians. He united the copiouſneſs of Dryden with the fire of Lucan, and he reſembles them alſo in their faults; in their extravagance and impetuoſity. He has compoſed a great number of Tragedies, very unequal in their merit. His beſt and moſt eſteemed pieces, are the Cid, Horace, Polyeucte, and Cinna.

Racine, as a Tragic Poet, is much ſuperior to Corneille. He wanted the copiouſneſs and grandeur of Corneille's imagination; but is free from his bombaſt, and excels him greatly in tenderneſs. Few Poets, indeed, are more tender and moving than Racine. His Phædra, his Andromaque, his Athalie, and his Mithridate, are excellent

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excellent dramatic performances, and do no ſmall honour to the French Stage. His language and verſification are uncommonly beautiful. Of all the French Authors, he appears to me to have moſt excelled in Poetical Style; to have managed their Rhyme with the greateſt advantage and facility, and to have given it the moſt complete harmony. Voltaire has, again and again, pronounced Racine's Athalie to be the "Chef "d'Oeuvre" of the French Stage. It is altogether a ſacred drama, and owes much of its elevation to the Majeſty of Religion; but it is leſs tender and intereſting than Andromaque. Racine has formed two of his plays upon plans of Euripides. In the Phædra he is extremely ſucceſsful, but not ſo, in my opinion, in the Iphigenie; where he has degraded the antient characters, by unſeaſonable gallantry. Achilles is a French Lover; and Eriphile, a modern Lady *.

VOLTAIRE,

* The characters of Corneille and Racine are happily contraſted with each other, in the following beautiful lines of a French Poet, which will gratify ſeveral readers:

CORNEILLE.

Illum nobilibus majeſtas evehit alis
Vertice tangentem nubis: ſtant ordine longo
Magnanimi circum heroës, fulgentibus omnes
Induti trabeis; Polyeuctus, Cinna, Seleucus,
Et Cidus, et rugis ſignatus Horatius ora.

RACINE.

Hunc circumvolitat penna alludente Cupido,
Vincla triumphatis inſternens florea ſcenis:

Colligit

VOLTAIRE, in ſeveral of his Tragedies, is inferior to none of his predeceſſors. In one great article, he has outdone them all, in the delicate and intereſting ſituations which he has contrived to introduce. In theſe lies his chief ſtrength. He is not, indeed, exempt from the defects LECT. XLVI.

Colligit hæc mollis genius, levibuſque catenis
Heröas ſtringit dociles, Pyrrhoſque, Titoſque,
Pelidaſque ac Hippolytos, qui ſponte ſequuntur
Servitium, facileſque ferunt in vincula palmas.
Ingentes nimirum animos Cornelius ingens,
Et quales habet ipſe, ſuis heröibus afflat
Sublimes ſenſus; vox olli maſcula, magnum os,
Nec mortale ſonans. Rapido fluit impete vena,
Vena Sophocleis non inficianda fluentis.
Racinius Gallis haud viſos ante theatris
Mollior ingenio teneros induxit amores.
Magnanimos quamvis ſenſus ſub pectore verſet
Agrippina, licet Romano robore Burrhus
Polleat, et magni generoſa ſuperbia Pori
Non ſemel eniteat, tamen eſſe ad mollia natum
Credideris vatem; vox olli mellea, lenis
Spiritus eſt; non ille animis vim concitus infert,
At cœcos animorum aditus rimatur, et imis
Mentibus occultos, ſyren penetrabilis, ictus
Inſinuans, palpando ferit, læditque placendo.
Vena fluit facili non intermiſſa nitore,
Nec rapidos ſemper volvit cum murmure fluctus,
Agmine ſed leni fluitat. Seu gramina lambit
Rivulus, et cœco per prata virentia lapſu,
Aufugiens, tacita fluit indeprenſus arena;
Flore micant ripæ illimes; huc vulgus amantum
Convolat, et lacrymis auget rivalibus undas:
Singultus undæ referunt, gemituſque ſonoros
Ingeminant, molli gemitus imitante ſuſurro.

Templum Tragœdiæ, per FR. MARSY, è Societate Jeſu.

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of the other French Tragedians, of wanting force, and of being ſometimes too long and declamatory in his ſpeeches; but his characters are drawn with ſpirit, his events are ſtriking, and in his ſentiments there is much elevation. His Zayre, Alzire, Meropé, and Orphan of China, are four capital Tragedies, and deſerve the higheſt praiſe. What one might perhaps not expect, Voltaire is, in the ſtrain of his ſentiments, the moſt religious, and the moſt moral, of all Tragic Poets.

Though the muſical Dramas of Metaſtaſio fulfil not the character of juſt and regular Tragedies, they approach however ſo near to it, and poſſeſs ſo much merit, that it would be unjuſt to paſs them over without notice. For the elegance of Style, the charms of Lyric Poetry, and the beauties of ſentiment, they are eminent. They abound in well-contrived and intereſting ſituations. The Dialogue, by its cloſeneſs and rapidity, carries a conſiderable reſemblance to that of the Antient Greek Tragedies; and is both more animated and more natural, than the long declamation of the French Theatre. But the ſhortneſs of the ſeveral Dramas, and the intermixture of ſo much Lyric Poetry as belongs to this ſort of Compoſition, often occaſions the courſe of the incidents to be hurried on too quickly, and prevents that conſiſtent diſplay of characters, and that full preparation of events, which are neceſſary to give a proper veriſimilitude to Tragedy.

It

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It only now remains to ſpeak of the ſtate of Tragedy in Great Britain; the general character of which is, that it is more animated and paſſionate than French Tragedy, but more irregular and incorrect, and leſs attentive to decorum and to elegance. The pathetic, it muſt always be remembered, is the ſoul of Tragedy. The Engliſh, therefore, muſt be allowed to have aimed at the higheſt ſpecies of excellence; though, in the execution, they have not always joined the other beauties that ought to accompany the pathetic.

The firſt object which preſents itſelf to us on the Engliſh Theatre, is the great Shakeſpeare. Great he may be juſtly called, as the extent and force of his natural genius, both for Tragedy and Comedy, are altogether unrivalled *. But,

* The character which Dryden has drawn of Shakeſpeare is not only juſt, but uncommonly elegant and happy. "He was "the man, who, of all modern, and perhaps antient Poets, had "the largeſt and moſt comprehenſive ſoul. All the images of "Nature were ſtill preſent to him, and he drew them not "laboriouſly, but luckily. When he deſcribes any thing, you "more than ſee it; you feel it too. They who accuſe him of "wanting learning, give him the greateſt commendation. He "was naturally learned. He needed not the Spectacles of "Books to read Nature. He looked inward, and found her "there. I cannot ſay he is every where alike. Were he ſo, "I ſhould do him injury to compare him to the greateſt of "mankind. He is many times flat and inſipid; his comic wit "degenerating into clenches; his ſerious ſwelling into bombaſt. "But he is always great, when ſome great occaſion is pre-"ſented to him." DRYDEN'S Eſſay of Dramatic Poetry.

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at the ſame time, it is genius ſhooting wild; deficient in juſt taſte, and altogether unaſſiſted by knowledge or art. Long has he been idoliſed by the Britiſh nation; much has been ſaid, and much has been written concerning him; Criticiſm has been drawn to the very dregs, in commentaries upon his words and witticiſms; and yet it remains, to this day, in doubt, whether his beauties, or his faults, be greateſt. Admirable ſcenes, and paſſages, without number, there are in his Plays; paſſages beyond what are to be found in any other Dramatic Writer; but there is hardly any one of his Plays which can be called altogether a good one, or which can be read with uninterrupted pleaſure from beginning to end. Beſides extreme irregularities in conduct, and groteſque mixtures of ſerious and comic in one piece, we are often interrupted by unnatural thoughts, harſh expreſſions, a certain obſcure bombaſt, and a play upon words, which he is fond of purſuing; and theſe interruptions to our pleaſure too frequently occur, on occaſions when we would leaſt wiſh to meet with them. All theſe faults, however, Shakeſpeare redeems by two of the greateſt excellencies which any Tragic Poet can poſſeſs; his lively and diverſified paintings of character; his ſtrong and natural expreſſions of paſſion. Theſe are his two chief virtues; on theſe his merit reſts. Notwithſtanding his many abſurdities, all the while we are reading his Plays, we find ourſelves in the midſt of our fellows; we meet with men, vulgar perhaps in their manners, coarſe

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coarſe or harſh in their ſentiments, but ſtill they are men; they ſpeak with human voices, and are actuated by human paſſions; we are intereſted in what they ſay or do, becauſe we feel that they are of the ſame nature with ourſelves. It is therefore no matter of wonder, that from the more poliſhed and regular, but more cold and artificial performances of other Poets, the Public ſhould return with pleaſure to ſuch warm and genuine repreſentations of human nature. Shakeſpeare poſſeſſes likewiſe the merit of having created, for himſelf, a ſort of world of præternatural beings. His witches, ghoſts, fairies, and ſpirits of all kinds, are deſcribed with ſuch circumſtances of awful and myſterious ſolemnity, and ſpeak a language ſo peculiar to themſelves, as ſtrongly to affect the imagination. His two maſter-pieces, and in which, in my opinion, the ſtrength of his genius chiefly appears, are Othello and Macbeth. With regard to his hiſtorical plays, they are properly ſpeaking, neither Tragedies nor Comedies; but a peculiar ſpecies of Dramatic Entertainment, calculated to deſcribe the manners of the times of which he treats, to exhibit the principal characters, and to fix our imagination on the moſt intereſting events and revolutions of our own country *.

* See an excellent defence of Shakeſpeare's Hiſtorical Plays, and ſeveral juſt obſervations on his peculiar excellencies as a Tragic Poet, in Mrs. Montague's Eſſay on the Writings and Genius of Shakeſpeare.

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After the age of Shakeſpeare, we can produce in the Engliſh language ſeveral detached Tragedies of conſiderable merit. But we have not many Dramatic Writers, whoſe whole works are entitled either to particular criticiſm, or very high praiſe. In the Tragedies of Dryden and Lee, there is much fire, but mixed with much fuſtian and rant. Lee's "Theodoſius, or the "Force of Love," is the beſt of his pieces, and, in ſome of the ſcenes, does not want tenderneſs and warmth; though romantic in the plan, and extravagant in the ſentiments. Otway was endowed with a high portion of the Tragic ſpirit; which appears to great advantage in his two principal Tragedies, "The Orphan," and "Venice preſerved." In theſe, he is perhaps too Tragic; the diſtreſſes being ſo deep as to tear and overwhelm the mind. He is a Writer, doubtleſs, of genius and ſtrong paſſion; but, at the ſame time, exceedingly groſs and indelicate. No Tragedies are leſs moral than thoſe of Otway. There are no generous or noble ſentiments in them; but a licentious ſpirit often diſcovers itſelf. He is the very oppoſite of the French decorum; and has contrived to introduce obſcenity and indecent alluſions, into the midſt of deep Tragedy.

Rowe's Tragedies make a contraſt to thoſe of Otway. He is full of elevated and moral ſentiments. The Poetry is often good, and the language always pure and elegant; but, in moſt of his Plays, he is too cold and unintereſting; and

flowery

flowery rather than tragic. Two, however, he has produced, which deſerve to be exempted from this cenſure, Jane Shore and the Fair Penitent; in both of which, there are ſo many tender and truly pathetic ſcenes, as to render them juſtly favourites of the Public.

Dr. Young's Revenge is a play which diſcovers genius and fire; but wants tenderneſs, and turns too much upon the ſhocking and direful paſſions. In Congreve's Mourning Bride, there are ſome fine ſituations, and much good Poetry. The two firſt Acts are admirable. The meeting of Almeria with her huſband Oſmyn, in the tomb of Anſelmo, is one of the moſt ſolemn and ſtriking ſituations to be found in any Tragedy. The defects in the cataſtrophe, I pointed out in the laſt Lecture. Mr. Thomſon's Tragedies are too full of a ſtiff morality, which renders them dull and formal. Tancred and Sigiſmunda far excels the reſt; and for the plot, the characters, and ſentiments, juſtly deſerves a place among the beſt Engliſh Tragedies. Of later pieces, and of living Authors, it is not my purpoſe to treat.

Upon the whole, reviewing the Tragic Compoſitions of different nations, the following concluſions ariſe. A Greek Tragedy is the relation of any diſtreſsful or melancholy incident; ſometimes the effect of paſſion or crime, oftener of the decree of the Gods, ſimply expoſed; without much variety of parts or events, but natu-

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rally and beautifully ſet before us; heightened by the Poetry of the Chorus. A French Tragedy is a ſeries of artful and refined converſations, founded upon a variety of tragical and intereſting ſituations; carried on with little action and vehemence; but with much poetical beauty, and high propriety and decorum. An Engliſh Tragedy is the combat of ſtrong paſſions, ſet before us in all their violence; producing deep diſaſters; often irregularly conducted; abounding in action; and filling the Spectators with grief. The Antient Tragedies were more natural and ſimple; the Modern are more artful and complex. Among the French there is more correctneſs; among the Engliſh, more fire. Andromaque and Zayre ſoften, Othello and Venice Preſerved rend, the heart. It deſerves remark, that three of the greateſt maſter-pieces of the French Tragic Theatre, turn wholly upon religious ſubjects: the Athalie of Racine, the Polyeucte of Corneille, and the Zayre of Voltaire. The firſt is founded upon a hiſtorical paſſage of the Old Teſtament; in the other two, the diſtreſs ariſes from the zeal and attachment of the principal perſonages to the Chriſtian faith; and in all the three, the Authors have, with much propriety, availed themſelves of the Majeſty which may be derived from religious ideas.

LECTURE XLVII.

COMEDY.—GREEK AND ROMAN—FRENCH—ENGLISH COMEDY.

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COMEDY is ſufficiently diſcriminated from Tragedy, by its general ſpirit and ſtrain. While pity and terror, and the other ſtrong paſſions, form the province of the latter, the chief, or rather ſole inſtrument of the former, is ridicule. Comedy propoſes for its object, neither the great ſufferings, nor the great crimes of men; but their follies and ſlighter vices, thoſe parts of their character, which raiſe in beholders a ſenſe of impropriety, which expoſe them to be cenſured and laughed at by others, or which render them troubleſome in civil ſociety.

THIS general idea of Comedy, as a ſatirical exhibition of the improprieties and follies of mankind, is an idea very moral and uſeful. There is nothing in the nature, or general plan of this kind of Compoſition, that renders it liable to cenſure. To poliſh the manners of men,

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men, to promote attention to the proper decorums of ſocial behaviour, and, above all, to render vice ridiculous, is doing a real ſervice to the world. Many vices might be more ſucceſsfully exploded, by employing ridicule againſt them, than by ſerious attacks and arguments. At the ſame time, it muſt be confeſſed, that ridicule is an inſtrument of ſuch a nature, that when managed by unſkilful, or improper hands, there is hazard of its doing miſchief, inſtead of good to ſociety. For ridicule is far from being, as ſome have maintained it to be, a proper teſt of truth. On the contrary, it is apt to miſlead, and ſeduce, by the colours which it throws upon its objects; and it is often more difficult to judge, whether theſe colours be natural and proper, than it is to diſtinguiſh between ſimple truth and error. Licentious Writers, therefore, of the Comic claſs, have too often had it in their power to caſt a ridicule upon characters and objects which did not deſerve it. But this is a fault, not owing to the nature of Comedy, but to the genius and turn of the Writers of it. In the hands of a looſe, immoral Author, Comedy will miſlead and corrupt; while, in thoſe of a virtuous and well-intentioned one, it will be not only a gay and innocent, but a laudable and uſeful entertainment. French Comedy is an excellent ſchool of manners; while Engliſh Comedy has been too often the ſchool of vice.

THE rules reſpecting the Dramatic Action, which I delivered in the firſt Lecture upon Tragedy,

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gedy, belong equally to Comedy; and hence, of courſe, our diſquiſitions concerning it are ſhortened. It is equally neceſſary to both theſe forms of Dramatic Compoſition, that there be a proper unity of action and ſubject, that the unities of time and place be, as much as poſſible, preſerved; that is, that the time of the action be brought within reaſonable bounds; and the place of the action never changed, at leaſt, not during the courſe of each Act; that the ſeveral Scenes or ſucceſſive converſations be properly linked together; that the Stage be never totally evacuated till the Act cloſes; and that the reaſon ſhould appear to us, why the perſonages, who fill up the different Scenes, enter and go off the Stage, at the time when they are made to do ſo. The ſcope of all theſe rules, I ſhowed, was to bring the imitation as near as poſſible to probability; which is always neceſſary, in order to any imitation giving us pleaſure. This reaſon requires, perhaps, a ſtricter obſervance of the Dramatic rules in Comedy, than in Tragedy. For the action of Comedy being more familiar to us than that of Tragedy, more like what we are accuſtomed to ſee in common life, we judge more eaſily of what is probable, and are more hurt by the want of it. The probable and the natural, both in the conduct of the ſtory, and in the characters and ſentiments of the perſons who are introduced, are the great foundation, it muſt always be remembered, of the whole beauty of Comedy.

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THE ſubjects of Tragedy are not limited to any country or to any age. The Tragic Poet may lay his Scene in whatever region he pleaſes. He may form his ſubject upon the hiſtory, either of his own, or of a foreign country; and he may take it from any period that is agreeable to him, however remote in time. The reverſe of this holds in Comedy, for a clear and obvious reaſon. In the great vices, great virtues, and high paſſions, men of all countries and ages reſemble one another; and are therefore equally ſubjects for the Tragic Muſe. But thoſe decorums of behaviour, thoſe leſſer diſcriminations of character, which afford ſubject for Comedy, change with the differences of countries and times; and can never be ſo well underſtood by foreigners, as by natives. We weep for the heroes of Greece and Rome, as freely as we do for thoſe of our own country: but we are touched with the ridicule of ſuch manners and ſuch characters only, as we ſee and know; and therefore the ſcene and ſubject of Comedy ſhould always be laid in our own country, and in our own times. The Comic Poet, who aims at correcting improprieties and follies of behaviour, ſhould ſtudy "to catch the manners living as they riſe." It is not his buſineſs to amuſe us with a tale of the laſt age, or with a Spaniſh or a French intrigue; but to give us pictures taken from among ourſelves; to ſatirize reigning and preſent vices; to exhibit to the age a faithful copy of itſelf, with its humours, its follies, and its extravagancies. It is only by laying his plan in this

manner, that he can add weight and dignity to the entertainment which he gives us. Plautus, it is true, and Terence, did not follow this rule. They laid the ſcene of their Comedies in Greece, and adopted the Greek laws and cuſtoms. But it muſt be remembered, that Comedy was, in their age, but a new entertainment in Rome; and that then they contented themſelves with imitating, often with tranſlating merely, the Comedies of Menander, and other Greek Writers. In aftertimes, it is known that the Romans had the "Comœdia Togata," or what was founded on their own manners, as well as the "Comœdia "Palliata," or what was taken from the Greeks. LECT. XLVII.

COMEDY may be divided into two kinds; Comedy of Character, and Comedy of Intrigue. In the latter, the plot, or the action of the Play, is made the principal object. In the former, the diſplay of ſome peculiar character is chiefly aimed at; the action is contrived altogether with a view to this end; and is treated as ſubordinate to it. The French abound moſt in Comedies of Character. All Moliere's capital pieces are of this ſort; his Avare, for inſtance, Miſanthrope, Tartuffe; and ſuch are Deſtouches's alſo, and thoſe of the other chief French Comedians. The Engliſh abound more in Comedies of Intrigue. In the Plays of Congreve, and, in general, in all our Comedies, there is much more ſtory, more buſtle and action, than on the French Theatre.

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In order to give this ſort of Compoſition its proper advantage, theſe two kinds ſhould be properly mixed together. Without ſome intereſting and well-conducted ſtory, mere converſation is apt to become inſipid. There ſhould be always as much intrigue, as to give us ſomething to wiſh, and ſomething to fear. The incidents ſhould ſo ſucceed one another, as to produce ſtriking ſituations, and to fix our attention; while they afford at the ſame time a proper field for the exhibition of character. For the Poet muſt never forget, that to exhibit characters and manners is his principal object. The action in Comedy, though it demands his care, in order to render it animated and natural, is a leſs ſignificant and important part of the performance, than the action in Tragedy: as in Comedy, it is what men ſay, and how they behave, that draws our attention, rather than what they perform, or what they ſuffer. Hence it is a great fault to overcharge it with too much intrigue, and thoſe intricate Spaniſh plots that were faſhionable for a while, carried on by perplexed apartments, dark entries, and diſguiſed habits, are now juſtly condemned and laid aſide: for by ſuch conduct, the main uſe of Comedy was loſt. The attention of the Spectators, inſtead of being directed towards any diſplay of characters, was fixed upon the ſurpriſing turns and revolutions of the intrigue; and Comedy was changed into a mere Novel.

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In the management of Characters, one of the moſt common faults of Comic Writers, is the carrying of them too far beyond life. Wherever ridicule is concerned, it is indeed extremely difficult to hit the preciſe point where true wit ends, and buffoonery begins. When the Miſer, for inſtance, in Plautus, ſearching the perſon whom he ſuſpects for having ſtolen his caſket, after examining firſt his right hand, and then his left, cries out, "oſtende etiam tertiam," "ſhew me your third hand" (a ſtroke too which Moliere has copied from him), there is no one but muſt be ſenſible of the extravagance. Certain degrees of exaggeration are allowed to the Comedian; but there are limits ſet to it by nature and good taſte; and ſuppoſing the Miſer to be ever ſo much engroſſed by his jealouſy and his ſuſpicions, it is impoſſible to conceive any man in his wits ſuſpecting another of having more than two hands.

Characters in Comedy ought to be clearly diſtinguiſhed from one another; but the artificial contraſting of characters, and the introducing them always in pairs, and by oppoſites, give too theatrical and affected an air to the Piece. This is become too common a reſource of Comic Writers, in order to heighten their characters, and diſplay them to more advantage. As ſoon as the violent and impatient perſon arrives upon the Stage, the Spectator knows that, in the next ſcene, he is to be contraſted with the mild and good-natured man; or if one of the

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the lovers introduced be remarkably gay and airy, we are ſure that his companion is to be a grave and ſerious lover; like Frankly and Bellamy, Clarinda and Jacintha, in Dr. Hoadly's Suſpicious Huſband. Such production of Characters by pairs, is like the employment of the figure Antitheſis in Diſcourſe, which, as I formerly obſerved, gives brilliancy indeed upon occaſions, but is too apparently a rhetorical artifice. In every ſort of compoſition, the perfection of art is to conceal art. A maſterly Writer will therefore give us his characters, diſtinguiſhed rather by ſuch ſhades of diverſity as are commonly found in Society, than marked with ſuch ſtrong oppoſitions, as are rarely brought into actual contraſt, in any of the circumſtances of life.

The Style of Comedy ought to be pure, elegant, and lively, very ſeldom riſing higher than the ordinary tone of polite converſation; and, upon no occaſion, deſcending into vulgar, mean, and groſs expreſſions. Here the French rhyme, which in many of their Comedies they have preſerved, occurs as an unnatural bondage. Certainly, if Proſe belongs to any Compoſition whatever, it is to that which imitates the converſation of men in ordinary life. One of the moſt difficult circumſtances in writing Comedy, and one too, upon which the ſucceſs of it very much depends, is to maintain, throughout, a current of eaſy, genteel, unaffected dialogue, without pertneſs and flippancy; without too much

much ſtudied and unſeaſonable wit; without dullneſs and formality. Too few of our Engliſh Comedies are diſtinguiſhed for this happy turn of converſation; moſt of them are liable to one or other of the exceptions I have mentioned. The Careleſs Huſband, and, perhaps, we may add the Provoked Huſband, and the Suſpicious Huſband, ſeem to have more merit than moſt of them, for eaſy and natural dialogue. LECT. XLVII.

These are the chief obſervations that occur to me, concerning the general principles of this ſpecies of Dramatic Writing, as diſtinguiſhed from Tragedy. But its nature and ſpirit will be ſtill better underſtood, by a ſhort hiſtory of its progreſs; and a view of the manner in which it has been carried on by Authors of different nations.

Tragedy is generally ſuppoſed to have been more antient among the Greeks than Comedy. We have fewer lights concerning the origin and progreſs of the latter. What is moſt probable, is, that, like the other, it took its riſe accidentally from the diverſions peculiar to the feaſt of Bacchus, and from Theſpis and his Cart; till, by degrees, it diverged into an entertainment of a quite different nature from ſolemn and heroic Tragedy. Critics diſtinguiſh three ſtages of Comedy among the Greeks; which they call the Antient, the Middle, and the New.

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THE Antient Comedy conſiſted in direct and avowed ſatire againſt particular known perſons, who were brought upon the Stage by name. Of this nature are the Plays of Ariſtophanes, eleven of which are ſtill extant; Plays of a very ſingular nature, and wholly different from all Compoſitions which have, ſince that age, borne the name of Comedy. They ſhew what a turbulent and licentious Republic that of Athens was, and what unreſtrained ſcope the Athenians gave to ridicule, when they could ſuffer the moſt illuſtrious perſonages of their ſtate, their generals, and their magiſtrates, Cleon, Lamachus, Nicias, Alcibiades, not to mention Socrates the Philoſopher, and Euripides the Poet, to be publickly made the ſubject of Comedy. Several of Ariſtophanes's Plays are wholly political ſatires upon public management, and the conduct of generals and ſtateſmen, during the Peloponneſian war. They are ſo full of political allegories and alluſions, that it is impoſſible to underſtand them without a conſiderable knowledge of the hiſtory of thoſe times. They abound too with Parodies of the great Tragic Poets, particularly of Euripides; to whom the Author bore much enmity, and has written two Comedies, almoſt wholly in order to ridicule him.

VIVACITY, Satire, and Buffoonery, are the characteriſtics of Ariſtophanes. Genius and force he diſplays upon many occaſions; but his performances, upon the whole, are not calculated to give us any high opinion of the Attic

taſte of wit in his age. They ſeem, indeed, to have been compoſed for the mob. The ridicule employed in them is extravagant; the wit, for the moſt part, buffooniſh and farcical; the perſonal raillery, biting and cruel; and the obſcenity that reigns in them is groſs and intolerable. The treatment given by this Comedian, to Socrates the Philoſopher, in his Play of "The "Clouds," is well known; but however it might tend to diſparage Socrates in the public eſteem, P. Brumoy, in his Theatre Grec, makes it appear, that it could not have been, as is commonly ſuppoſed, the cauſe of decreeing the death of that Philoſopher, which did not happen till twenty-three years after the repreſentation of Ariſtophanes's Clouds. There is a Chorus in Ariſtophanes's Plays; but altogether of an irregular kind. It is partly ſerious, partly comic; ſometimes mingles in the Action, ſometimes addreſſes the Spectators, defends the Author, and attacks his enemies. LECT. XLVII.

Soon after the days of Ariſtophanes, the liberty of attacking perſons on the Stage by name, being found of dangerous conſequence to the public peace, was prohibited by law. The Chorus alſo was, at this period, baniſhed from the Comic Theatre, as having been an inſtrument of too much licence and abuſe. Then, what is called the Middle Comedy took riſe, which was no other than an eluſion of the law. Fictitious names, indeed, were employed; but living perſons were ſtill attacked, and deſcribed

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in ſuch a manner as to be ſufficiently known. Of theſe Comic Pieces we have no remains. To them ſucceeded the New Comedy; when the Stage being obliged to deſiſt wholly from perſonal ridicule, became, what it is now, the picture of manners and characters, but not of particular perſons. Menander was the moſt diſtinguiſhed Author of this kind among the Greeks; and both from the imitations of him by Terence, and the account given of him by Plutarch, we have much reaſon to regret that his writings have periſhed; as he appears to have reformed, in a very high degree, the public taſte, and to have ſet the model of correct, elegant, and moral Comedy.

The only remains which we now have of the New Comedy, among the Antients, are the Plays of Plautus and Terence; both of whom were formed upon the Greek Writers. Plautus is diſtinguiſhed for very expreſſive language, and a great degree of the Vis Comica. As he wrote in an early period, he bears ſeveral marks of the rudeneſs of the Dramatic Art, among the Romans, in his time. He opens his Plays with Prologues, which ſometimes pre-occupy the ſubject of the whole Piece. The repreſentation too, and the action of the Comedy, are ſometimes confounded; the Actor departing from his character, and addreſſing the Audience. There is too much low wit and ſcurrility in Plautus; too much of quaint conceit, and play upon words. But withal, he diſplays more variety,

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riety, and more force than Terence. His characters are always ſtrongly marked, though ſometimes coarſely. His Amphytrion has been copied both by Moliere and by Dryden; and his Miſer alſo (in the Aulularia), is the foundation of a capital Play of Moliere's, which has been once and again imitated on the Engliſh Stage. Than Terence, nothing can be more delicate, more poliſhed, and elegant. His Style is a model of the pureſt and moſt graceful Latinity. His dialogue is always decent and correct; and he poſſeſſes, beyond moſt Writers, the art of relating with that beautiful pictureſque ſimplicity, which never fails to pleaſe. His morality is, in general, unexceptionable. The ſituations which he introduces, are often tender and intereſting; and many of his ſentiments touch the heart. Hence, he may be conſidered as the founder of that ſerious Comedy, which has, of late years, been revived, and of which I ſhall have occaſion afterwards to ſpeak. If he fails in any thing, it is in ſprightlineſs and ſtrength. Both in his Characters, and in his Plots, there is too much ſameneſs and uniformity throughout all his Plays; he copied Menander, and is ſaid not to have equalled him*. In order to form a perfect

* Julius Cæſar has given us his opinion of Terence, in the following lines, which are preſerved in the Life of Terence, aſcribed to Suetonius:

Tu quoque, tu in ſummis, ô dimidiate Menander,
Poneris, et merito, puri ſermonis amator;

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perfect Comic Author, an union would be requisite of the spirit and fire of Plautus, with the grace and correctness of Terence.

When we enter on the view of Modern Comedy, one of the first objects which presents itself, is the Spanish Theatre, which has been remarkably fertile in Dramatic Productions. Lopez de Vega, Guillin, and Calderon, are the chief Spanish Comedians. Lopez de Vega, who is by much the most famous of them, is said to have written above a thousand Plays; but our surprise at the number of his productions will be diminished, by being informed of their nature. From the account which M. Perron de Castera, a French Writer, gives of them, it would seem, that our Shakespeare is perfectly a regular and methodical Author, in comparison of Lopez. He throws aside all regard to the Three Unities, or to any of the established forms of Dramatic Writing. One Play often includes many years, nay, the whole life of a man. The Scene, during the first Act, is laid in Spain, the next in Italy, and the third in Africa. His Plays are mostly of the historical kind, founded on the annals of the country; and they are, generally, a sort of Tragi-comedies; or a mixture of Heroic Speeches, Serious Incidents, War, and

Lenibus atque utinam scriptis adjuncta foret vis
Comica, ut æquato virtus polleret honore
Cum Græcis, neque in hac despectus parte jaceres;
Unum hoc maceror, et doleo tibi deesse, Terenti.

Slaughter,

Slaughter, with much Ridicule and Buffoonery. Angels and Gods, Virtues and Vices, Chriſtian Religion, and Pagan Mythology, are all frequently jumbled together. In ſhort, they are Plays like no other Dramatic Compoſitions; full of the romantic and extravagant. At the ſame time, it is generally admitted, that in the Works of Lopez de Vega, there are frequent marks of genius, and much force of imagination; many well-drawn characters; many happy ſituations; many ſtriking and intereſting ſurpriſes; and, from the ſource of his rich invention, the Dramatic Writers of other countries are ſaid to have frequently drawn their materials. He himſelf apologiſes for the extreme irregularity of his Compoſition, from the prevailing taſte of his countrymen, who delighted in a variety of events, in ſtrange and ſurpriſing adventures, and a labyrinth of intrigues, much more than in a natural and regularly conducted Story. LECT. XLVII.

The general characters of the French Comic Theatre are, that it is correct, chaſte, and decent. Several Writers of conſiderable note it has produced, ſuch as Regnard, Dufreſny, Dancourt, and Marivaux; but the Dramatic Author in whom the French glory moſt, and whom they juſtly place at the head of all their Comedians, is the famous Moliere. There is, indeed, no Author, in all the fruitful and diſtinguiſhed age of Louis XIV. who has attained a higher reputation than Moliere; or, who has more nearly reached the ſummit of perfection in his own art,

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according to the judgment of all the French Critics. Voltaire boldly pronounces him to be the moſt eminent Comic Poet of any age or country: nor, perhaps, is this the deciſion of mere partiality; for taking him upon the whole, I know none who deſerves to be preferred to him. Moliere is always the Satiriſt only of vice or folly. He has ſelected a great variety of ridiculous characters peculiar to the times in which he lived, and he has generally placed the ridicule juſtly. He poſſeſſed ſtrong Comic powers; he is full of mirth and pleaſantry; and his pleaſantry is always innocent. His Comedies in Verſe, ſuch as the Miſanthrope and Tartuffe, are a kind of dignified Comedy, in which vice is expoſed, in the ſtyle of elegant and polite Satire. In his Proſe Comedies, though there is abundance of ridicule, yet there is never any thing found to offend a modeſt ear, or to throw contempt on ſobriety and virtue. Together with thoſe high qualities, Moliere has alſo ſome defects, which Voltaire, though his profeſſed Panegyriſt, candidly admits. He is acknowledged not to be happy in the unravelling of his Plots. Attentive more to the ſtrong exhibition of characters, than to the conduct of the intrigue, his unravelling is frequently brought on with too little preparation, and in an improbable manner. In his Verſe Comedies, he is ſometimes not ſufficiently intereſting, and too full of long ſpeeches; and in his more riſible Pieces in Proſe, he is cenſured for being too farcical. Few Writers, however, if any, ever poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed the ſpirit, or attained the true end of Comedy, ſo perfectly, upon the whole, as Moliere. His *Tartuffe*, in the ſtyle of Grave Comedy, and his *Avare*, in the Gay, are accounted his two capital productions. LECT. XLVII.

From the Engliſh Theatre, we are naturally led to expect a greater variety of original characters in Comedy, and bolder ſtrokes of wit and humour, than are to be found on any other Modern Stage. Humour is, in a great meaſure, the peculiar province of the Engliſh nation. The nature of ſuch a free Government as ours; and that unreſtrained liberty which our manners allow to every man, of living entirely after his own taſte, afford full ſcope to the diſplay of ſingularity of character, and to the indulgence of humour in all its forms. Whereas, in France, the influence of a deſpotic court, the more eſtabliſhed ſubordination of ranks, and the univerſal obſervance of the forms of politeneſs and decorum, ſpread a much greater uniformity over the outward behaviour and characters of men. Hence Comedy has a more ample field, and can flow with a much freer vein in Britain, than in France. But it is extremely unfortunate, that, together with the freedom and boldneſs of the Comic ſpirit in Britain, there ſhould have been joined ſuch a ſpirit of indecency and licentiouſneſs, as has diſgraced Engliſh Comedy beyond that of any nation ſince the days of Ariſtophanes.

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THE firſt age, however, of Engliſh Comedy, was not infected by this ſpirit. Neither the Plays of Shakeſpeare, nor thoſe of Ben Jonſon, can be accuſed of immoral tendency. Shakeſpeare's general character, which I gave in the laſt Lecture, appears with as great advantage in his Comedies, as in his Tragedies; a ſtrong, fertile, and creative genius, irregular in conduct, employed too often in amuſing the mob, but ſingularly rich and happy in the deſcription of characters and manners. Jonſon is more regular in the conduct of his pieces, but ſtiff and pedantic; though not deſtitute of Dramatic Genius. In the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, much fancy and invention appear, and ſeveral beautiful paſſages may be found. But, in general, they abound with romantic and improbable incidents, with overcharged and unnatural characters, and with coarſe and groſs alluſions. Theſe Comedies of the laſt age, by the change of public manners, and of the turn of converſation, ſince their time, are now become too obſolete to be very agreeable. For we muſt obſerve, that Comedy, depending much on the prevailing modes of external behaviour, becomes ſooner antiquated than any other ſpecies of writing; and, when antiquated, it ſeems harſh to us, and loſes its power of pleaſing. This is eſpecially the caſe with reſpect to the Comedies of our own country, where the change of manners is more ſenſible and ſtriking than in any foreign production. In our own country, the preſent mode of behaviour is always the ſtandard

of

of politeneſs; and whatever departs from it appears uncouth; whereas in the Writings of foreigners, we are leſs acquainted with any ſtandard of this kind, and of courſe are leſs hurt by the want of it. Plautus appeared more antiquated to the Romans, in the age of Auguſtus, than he does now to us. It is a high proof of Shakeſpeare's uncommon genius, that, notwithſtanding theſe diſadvantages, his character of Falſtaff is to this day admired, and his "Merry Wives of Windſor" read with pleaſure.

It was not till the æra of the Reſtoration of King Charles II. that the licentiouſneſs which was obſerved, at that period, to infect the court, and the nation in general, ſeized, in a peculiar manner, upon Comedy as its province, and, for almoſt a whole century, retained poſſeſſion of it. It was then firſt, that the Rake became the predominant character, and, with ſome exceptions, the Hero of every Comedy. The ridicule was thrown, not upon vice and folly, but much more commonly upon chaſtity and ſobriety. At the end of the Play, indeed, the Rake is commonly, in appearance, reformed, and profeſſes that he is to become a ſober man; but throughout the Play, he is ſet up as the model of a fine gentleman; and the agreeable impreſſion made by a ſort of ſprightly licentiouſneſs, is left upon the imagination, as a picture of the pleaſurable enjoyment of life; while the reformation paſſes ſlightly away, as a matter of mere form. To what ſort of moral conduct ſuch public entertainments

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tainments as theſe tend to form the youth of both ſexes, may be eaſily imagined. Yet this has been the ſpirit which has prevailed upon the Comic Stage of Great Britain, not only during the reign of Charles II. but throughout the reigns of King William and Queen Anne, and down to the days of King George II.

Dryden was the firſt conſiderable Dramatic Writer after the Reſtoration; in whoſe Comedies, as in all his works, there are found many ſtrokes of genius, mixed with great careleſſneſs, and viſible marks of haſty compoſition. As he ſought to pleaſe only, he went along with the manners of the times; and has carried through all his Comedies that vein of diſſolute licentiouſneſs, which was then faſhionable. In ſome of them, the indecency was ſo groſs as to occaſion, even in that age, a prohibition of being brought upon the Stage*.

Since his time, the Writers of Comedy, of greateſt note, have been Cibber, Vanburgh, Farquhar, and Congreve. Cibber has written a great

* "The mirth which he excites in Comedy will, perhaps, be "found not ſo much to ariſe from any original humour, or "peculiarity of character, nicely diſtinguiſhed, and diligently "purſued, as from incidents and circumſtances, artifices and "ſurpriſes, from jeſts of action, rather than ſentiment. What "he had of humorous, or paſſionate, he ſeems to have had, "not from nature, but from other Poets; if not always a pla-"giary, yet, at leaſt, an imitator." Johnson's Life of Dryden.

great many Comedies; and though, in ſeveral of them, there be much ſprightlineſs, and a certain pert vivacity peculiar to him, yet they are ſo forced and unnatural in the incidents, as to have generally ſunk into obſcurity, except two, which have always continued in high favour with the Public, "The Careleſs Huſband," and "The Provoked Huſband." The former is remarkable for the polite and eaſy turn of the Dialogue; and, with the exception of one indelicate Scene, is tolerably moral too in the conduct, and in the tendency. The latter, "The Provoked Huſband," (which was the joint production of Vanburgh and Cibber,) is, perhaps, on the whole, the beſt Comedy in the Engliſh Language. It is liable, indeed, to one critical objection, of having a double Plot: as the incidents of the Wronghead family, and thoſe of Lord Townley's, are ſeparate, and independent of each other. But this irregularity is compenſated by the natural characters, the fine painting, and the happy ſtrokes of humour with which it abounds. We are, indeed, ſurpriſed to find ſo unexceptionable a Comedy proceeding from two ſuch looſe Authors; for, in its general ſtrain, it is calculated to expoſe licentiouſneſs and folly; and would do honour to any Stage.

Sir John Vanburgh has ſpirit, wit, and eaſe; but he is, to the laſt degree, groſs and indelicate. He is one of the moſt immoral of all our Comedians. His "Provoked Wife" is full of ſuch

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ſuch indecent ſentiments and alluſions, as ought to explode it out of all reputable ſociety. His "Relapſe" is equally cenſurable; and theſe are his only two conſiderable Pieces. Congreve is, unqueſtionably, a Writer of genius. He is lively, witty, and ſparkling; full of character, and full of action. His chief fault as a Comic Writer is, that he overflows with wit. It is often introduced unſeaſonably; and, almoſt every where, there is too great a proportion of it for natural well-bred converſation*. Farquhar is a light and gay Writer; leſs correct, and leſs ſparkling than Congreve; but he has more eaſe, and, perhaps, fully as great a ſhare of the Vis Comica. The two beſt, and leaſt exceptionable of his Plays, are the "Recruiting Officer," and the "Beaux Stratagem." I ſay the leaſt exceptionable; for, in general, the tendency of both Congreve and Farquhar's Plays is immoral. Throughout them all, the Rake, the looſe intrigue, and the life of licentiouſneſs, are the objects continually held up to view; as if the aſſemblies of a great and poliſhed nation could be amuſed with none but vicious objects. The indelicacy of theſe Writers, in the female characters which they introduce, is particularly remarkable. Nothing can be more awkward than

* Dr. Johnſon ſays of him, in his Life, that "his perſonages "are a kind of intellectual Gladiators; every ſentence is to "ward, or to ſtrike; the conteſt of ſmartneſs is never inter-"mitted; his wit is a meteor, playing to and fro, with alter-"nate corruſcations."

their

their repreſentations of a woman of virtue and honour. Indeed, there are hardly any female characters in their Plays, except two; women of looſe principles, or when a virtuous character is attempted to be drawn, women of affected manners.

The cenſure which I have now paſſed upon theſe celebrated Comedians, is far from being overſtrained or ſevere. Accuſtomed to the indelicacy of our own Comedy, and amuſed with the wit and humour of it, its immorality too eaſily eſcapes our obſervation. But all foreigners, the French eſpecially, who are accuſtomed to a better regulated and more decent Stage, ſpeak of it with ſurpriſe and aſtoniſhment. Voltaire, who is, aſſuredly, none of the moſt auſtere moraliſts, plumes himſelf not a little upon the ſuperior *bienſéance* of the French Theatre; and ſays, that the language of Engliſh Comedy is the language of debauchery, not of politeneſs. M. Moralt, in his Letters upon the French and Engliſh Nations, aſcribes the corruption of manners in London to Comedy, as its chief cauſe. Their Comedy, he ſays, is like that of no other country; it is the ſchool in which the youth of both ſexes familiariſe themſelves with vice, which is never repreſented there as vice, but as mere gaiety. As for Comedies, ſays the ingenious M. Diderot, in his obſervations upon Dramatic Poetry, the Engliſh have none; they have, in their place, ſatires, full indeed of gaiety and force, but without morals, and without taſte;

ſans

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ſans mœurs et ſans gout. There is no wonder, therefore, that Lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticiſm, ſhould have expreſſed himſelf, upon this ſubject, of the indelicacy of Engliſh Comedy, in terms much ſtronger than any that I have uſed; concluding his invective againſt it in theſe words: "How odious ought thoſe "Writers to be, who thus ſpread infection "through their native country; employing the "talents which they have received from their "Maker moſt traitorouſly againſt Himſelf, by "endeavouring to corrupt and disfigure his "creatures. If the Comedies of Congreve did "not rack him with remorſe in his laſt mo-"ments, he muſt have been loſt to all ſenſe of "virtue." Vol. II. 479.

I AM happy, however, to have it in my power to obſerve, that, of late years, a ſenſible reformation has begun to take place in Engliſh Comedy. We have, at laſt, become aſhamed of making our public entertainments reſt wholly upon profligate characters and ſcenes; and our later Comedies, of any reputation, are much purified from the licentiouſneſs of former times. If they have not the ſpirit, the eaſe, and the wit of Congreve and Farquhar, in which reſpect they muſt be confeſſed to be ſomewhat deficient; this praiſe, however, they juſtly merit, of being innocent and moral.

FOR this reformation, we are, queſtionleſs, much indebted to the French Theatre, which

has not only been, at all times, more chaſte and inoffenſive than ours, but has, within theſe few years, produced a ſpecies of Comedy, of ſtill a graver turn than any that I have yet mentioned. This, which is called the Serious, or Tender Comedy, and was termed by its oppoſers, *La Comedie Larmoyante*, is not altogether a modern invention. Several of Terence's Plays, as the Andria, in particular, partake of this character; and as we know that Terence copied Menander, we have ſufficient reaſon to believe that his Comedies, alſo, were of the ſame kind. The nature of this compoſition does not by any means exclude gaiety and ridicule; but it lays the chief ſtreſs upon tender and intereſting ſituations; it aims at being ſentimental, and touching the heart by means of the capital incidents; it makes our pleaſure ariſe, not ſo much from the laughter which it excites, as from the tears of affection and joy which it draws forth.

In Engliſh, Steele's Conſcious Lovers is a Comedy which approaches to this character, and it has always been favourably received by the Public. In French, there are ſeveral Dramatic Compoſitions of this kind, which poſſeſs conſiderable merit and reputation, ſuch as the "Melanide," and "Prejugé à la Mode," of La Chauſſée; the "Père de Famille," of Diderot; the "Cénie," of Mad. Graffigny; and the "Nanine," and "L'Enfant Prodigue," of Voltaire.

LECT. XLVII.

When this form of Comedy firſt appeared in France, it excited a great controverſy among the Critics. It was objected to as a dangerous and unjuſtifiable innovation in Compoſition. It is not Comedy, ſaid they, for it is not founded on laughter and ridicule. It is not Tragedy, for it does not involve us in ſorrow. By what name then can it be called? or what pretenſions hath it to be comprehended under Dramatic Writing? But this was trifling, in the moſt egregious manner, with critical names and diſtinctions, as if theſe had invariably fixed the eſſence, and aſcertained the limits, of every ſort of Compoſition. Aſſuredly, it is not neceſſary that all Comedies ſhould be formed on one preciſe model. Some may be entirely light and gay; others may be more ſerious; ſome may be of a mixed nature; and all of them, properly executed, may furniſh agreeable and uſeful entertainment to the Public, by ſuiting the different taſtes of men *. Serious and tender Comedy has no title to claim to itſelf the poſſeſſion of the Stage, to the excluſion of ridicule and gaiety. But when it retains only its proper place, without uſurping the province of any other; when it is carried on with reſemblance to real life, and without

* "Il y a beaucoup de très bonnes pièces, où il ne regne "que de la gayeté; d'autres toutes ſérieuſes; d'autres melan- "gées; d'autres, où l'attendriſſement va juſq'aux larmes. Il "ne faut donner excluſion à aucune genre; & ſi l'on me de- "mandoit, quel genre eſt le meilleur? Je repondrois, celui qui "eſt le mieux traité." VOLTAIRE.

intro-

introducing romantic and unnatural ſituations, it may certainly prove both an intereſting and an agreeable ſpecies of Dramatic Writing. If it become inſipid and drawling, this muſt be imputed to the fault of the Author, not to the nature of the Compoſition, which may admit much livelineſs and vivacity.

In general, whatever form Comedy aſſumes, whether gay or ſerious, it may always be eſteemed a mark of Society advancing in true politeneſs, when thoſe theatrical exhibitions, which are deſigned for public amuſement, are cleared from indelicate ſentiment, or immoral tendency. Though the licentious buffoonery of Ariſtophanes amuſed the Greeks for a while, they advanced, by degrees, to a chaſter and juſter taſte; and the like progreſs of refinement may be concluded to take place among us, when the Public receive with favour, Dramatic Compoſitions of ſuch a ſtrain and ſpirit, as entertained the Greeks and Romans, in the days of Menander and Terence.

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